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*A Parish
of Two*

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A Parish of Two

Douglas Dayton Letters
By
Henry Goelet McVickar

Lercy Dashiel Letters
By
Trice Collier
(Lercy Collins)

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*A Parish
of Two*

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A Parish of Two

FIRST LETTER

New York.

DEAR PERCY: —

I am half-way through Amiel's Diary, the book you were surprised I had not read. I am also half-way through life. They both go slowly. Many people feel what they cannot express, and alas, more express what they could never feel. The charm about the book to you, no doubt, is its allusions and illusions. Any man who can dream of life as included in the fold of one profession, must love such a dreamer as this man. He must help you to make up your mind that dreams have substance

after all. You received your finest sensation from the book in your flattered vanity; in the knowledge that you were of the exclusives, who could understand its erudition and follow intelligently its maze. I wonder was it Amiel who said that "London is nothing but a suburb of Hell." Whether it was he or another, the phrase makes me chortle with joy. That is the way I feel about New York. New York, too, smells of Hellish things. In the first place, every one who knows me (and there is none such), knows that I am an overstrung harp, on which Fate plays discords that will, in the fulness of time, drive me crazy; and this city is "Fate," and "Fate is a humourist." It does the cruellest things. It compels me to see daily passing before my sunflower eyes relics of barbarism, called hansom cabs. They are so unbe-

fitting a progressive country. Why, of all places, America should have adopted a tradition (which is an insurmountable stone fence), and handicap herself like England, I cannot understand. Traditions are parasites that sap progress, which is life. A hansom cab is a sedan-chair on wheels. The driver has no control over the horse because his legs are cramped, and it takes twice its length to turn. Mark my words, the last hansom cab will be ridden in by a woman. Imbecility has a fatal fascination for the creatures who have a fatal fascination for us. Another thing that worries me is the manner in which our coachmen sit on the box. Never having had a coachman, I love the "our." They look as if they suffered from "mortal cramps;" their legs are tucked in, instead of stretched out, so, if the horse stumbled, they would

do an acrobatic feat as parabolic as unexpected. I do say, and, when I say "I do say," I mean it, that when fashions ignore common sense, common sense should ignore fashion. Now, at this point, put down this letter and light a cigarette, and say, "Really, Douglas's letters *are* a little dull. He will insist in trying to interest me in things that interest him." Well, old boy, that means that I belong to that full half of the world which is doing the self-same thing to the other half. The world can be divided in a million different halves (Hurrah, a paradox!), but a wise man once said to me: "The only sure division is that one half are trying to get fat and the other half lean." Do smile, for I think this funny.

I mean by "Hellish things" the items of news in the paper: "Young girl throws

vitriol in rival's face," "Man shoots his sweetheart and then himself," "Little schoolgirl lured into deserted hallway and assaulted." I know I come down-stairs to breakfast after an eight-hour interview with the gods, feeling as if the world were not such an impossible place, after all, and then come the newspapers and the blues and the horrors, and I feel it would be wiser not to go out without my revolver and a bowie knife. By the way, have you ever been interviewed by a reporter? I have.

Reporter: "The *Perennial Liar* would like to have the facts in regard to your inordinate love for your mother."

Victim: "I fail to see how this interests the public, so I decline to give any."

Reporter: "The other papers will have a 'story' in to-morrow's issue on the subject, so, should you refuse us the facts, we

may have to print something that would cause you pain."

This seems to me perilously near blackmail. The liberty of the press approaches the tyranny of the press.

I am surrounded at present by an atmosphere of illness, which is always a possible overture to death. In music (God bless it), it is all opera and little overture, but in life it is apt to be much overture and a "sustained note," called Death. Having so many members of my family ill has given me a feeling of loneliness which is akin to pain. Loneliness is a sense of nakedness, with this difference, that when naked you attract the attention of others, and when lonely you attract none. I am writing this in the library of the club, only one other in the room. I don't know who he is, but he is a wonder at observing the rules. He

is flanked on either side by a placard that reads "Silence," and never a word escapes him. "He" is a bust in bronze. He is a little brown and a little green, and his eyes lack expression, but he is very restful, which is grateful, as I have just left a man who has told me, at greater length, more things that I did not care to know than any one I have ever met. When I noticed in the library its beggarly array of empty chairs, I could not help realising how much you can drink if you don't read, and I could not help thinking how thankful the members must be that they were strong enough to resist the temptation to read.

Dear old man, I have not much news. I am "still heart-whole and fancy-free." I should like to continue "heart-whole," but I should much enjoy having my fancy made captive. This is a distinction with

a difference, but somehow, the women of the present day are so disillusionising, and to be in love one has to live on illusion. I have no illusions in regard to a woman's modesty; she has not as much as a man. This may be shocking and, to an American, sacrilegious, but nevertheless true. A woman, whose morals are like Cæsar's wife's, will dress in front of a window with the blinds up, when a man will not. A woman, in conversation, will handle without gloves subjects that a man handles with tongs, or not at all. I took a woman in to dinner the other night whom I had met but once before, but we had many common friends, mostly of her own sex. She regaled me with an account of their diseases, of operations that had been performed upon them, and like private facts of which I had been previously ignorant. I tried

to lead her gently back into channels less personal and distressing to others, but her pride in the fact that she was the only woman of her acquaintance quite sound and healthy must be proved first. I could not help wondering, if our friends could have overheard, what sort of a death they would have wished her.

I am so glad your affairs are coming on so well. I firmly believe there is a certain sort of magnetism about a piece of luck that draws another piece out of its hiding-place. Please don't tell me there is no such thing as "luck." A man told me that once, and he is now where he deserves to be — in a lunatic asylum. You certainly have a marvellous capacity to control your destiny, but I also have a marvellous capacity to let my destiny control me. Perhaps mine may prove the better way.

Hour by hour I have writ and writ, so
see you do the same. Answer this or pre-
pare to blush with shame on the Judgment
Day.

Yours,

DOUGLAS DAYTON.

SECOND LETTER

West Braintree, Mass.

DEAR DOUGLAS: —

So you have read and disliked Amiel's Journal. It seemed to me worthy of more praise than you vouchsafe it. But when one is in bed, as am I through this stupid accident, it is a temptation to devour books, and to leave the critical faculty to one side.

How many years it is since you and I knew one another well! — I mean by daily contact. Since then, I have been ten years a country parson in Massachusetts, and you — what have you been or become? At all events, you have lost none of your kindness, else I should not have heard from you

so soon after my accident. That I should have plunged into writing you of books may have surprised you, but books have been for a long time my adventures, as I fancy they have not been yours. It is wonderful how we slough off an old self, and forget him until the companion of that old self brings him fresh to mind. You at the club in New York, how could you be expected to visualise my parish here in West Braintree? I sometimes wonder how I got here myself! I who know the streets of London, Paris, Leipzig, and Berlin better than I know the tortuous paved paths of Boston, even here am I jogging along in as narrow a round of duties as ever befell a parson. There are people here, not an hour and a half from Boston by rail, who have never been to Boston,—two of my parishioners, indeed, have never been in a train.

The meeting-house is older than the oldest coat-of-arms in Newport, and there are children here whose great-grandfathers are living in the same street. How such propinquity of lineage would upset ancestral pretensions amongst many of your daily-society-news-chronicled friends! What would you think of a village community, where one of the half-dozen most prominent men in it was not asked out to dinner for twelve months at a stretch? Such an one am I, both as to the prominence and to the unmaskedness!

I never had anything of the priest about me, thank Heaven, but at twenty-two I was an enthusiast, and I jumped into this little ecclesiastical pool of monotony and began a terrible splashing. I became a sort of doer of good in a white tie, without much thought, to tell the truth, of the parsonical

restraints and dignities. I felt myself to be no more of a priest than any man in the pews in front of me on Sundays, only, if they preferred my enthusiastic and youthful talking — thundering it was at times — I took a salary — small — and they got what they wanted. They were curiosities to me — what a series of diurnal surprises I must have been to them in those days! I was the barbarous, rollicking young West, and they the East.

“The brooding East with awe beheld
Her impious younger world —
The Roman tempest swelled and swelled,
And on her head was hurled.

“The East bowed low before the blast,
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past
And plunged in thought again.”

I wonder if you will mind if I write you a line or so of “shop” just here, for I think

you civilians are prone to lump things, and to fail to make distinctions in the coterie outside your own. You know there are two classes of parsons: the lay parsons and the ecclesiastical parsons. The ecclesiastical parsons are the fellows who go in for being the Church, and the lay parsons are the fellows who look upon the Church as a branch of the ethical civil service of the world, and who go in for helping the Church. The first lot are all Papists, no matter whether they be Baptists or Episcopalians; the latter are all Protestants, no matter whether they be Unitarians or Broad Churchmen. The former all hold, in secret or openly, to that abominable doctrine which makes the minister *personam ecclesiae gerere*, the latter conceive of their position as having no more privileges, and no severer restraints than those incumbent

upon any other honourable God-fearing man. The one claims to have received his commission from some mysterious *extra* and *supra* mundane power of tactual succession — whatever in the realm of physical law that may mean — and the other wears his uniform, if he wears any at all, as a volunteer officer in a particular, distinguished, and highly honourable branch of the service of the world. The one chatters his gibberish about “once a priest always a priest;” and the other holds, just as you might, to nothing more than once a man always a man, and claims the standard to be as high for you, as for him.

But, merciful heavens! having just read over what I have written, I am dismayed at the thought of your reading it. You must look upon me as a charity! A crippled parson in a country parish in Massa-

chusetts, who can now only read and write, surely you will waft more epigrams my way. All your talk about "women," and "Hell," and "cigarettes" and "hansom cabs" and trussed coachmen — there is not a man in livery in this town, — is like burning a pastille in my room. Hot, sweet, Khayyamish as though a houri should be found sawing wood in the back yard. At forty, with a past of rowing, riding, swimming, sailing, football, sparring, a duel or two in Germany, a mountain sheep in the Rockies, and such huge pleasure in these physical activities, — at forty, to be told a wheel-chair, possibly, with luck, crutches, for the future, is a shock so unexpected that one hardly gauges the severity of it at once. I appreciate your kindness in writing me as though nothing had happened. No doubt I shall complain enough as time goes on,

without need of a chorus. What is one man's vertebræ out of kilter, among so many, anyway? There are just as many hansoms in Fifth Avenue — are there not? Even though your own clock runs down, time is measured by other people as calmly as though the most important tick, tick, tick, of all were still heard. You had your fling about loneliness in your letter. How strange it is as one gets older that loneliness which seemed in youth the one impossible malady, should become as natural as wrinkles or gray hair, and be it said, no more painful than these. The Roman's "When I am alone then am I least alone," seemed such insufferable priggishness at twenty, but later, one wonders how any sensible man can think or feel otherwise. The very fact of the development of individuality sets a man apart from others. It is this early

development of individuality that made Keats, and Shelley, and Byron, and Goethe seem so uppish and offish, and *affish* (this is a new word from the German *Affe*) in their youth. I suppose most men of real ability are lonesome, though some of them conceal it better than others.

I must stop. The back is aching a bit, and I have written you a long rambling screed. Do you remember the delightful *mot* of the younger Pliny, who wrote to a certain correspondent: "I must e'en write you a long letter since I have no time to write a short one?" How true it is that it takes time to condense.

Write me soon again. Tell me where you are, and what you are doing, and what other people without lame backs are doing. There must be a lot of life left yet to the wheel-chair-less half of the world.

You see that is the natural division to me.

Faithfully yours, my dear Douglas,

PERCY DASHIEL.

THIRD LETTER

MY DEAR PERCY: —

I did not speak of your accident because I imagined the subject had been exhausted by your friends in letters as well as words. The real value of spoken sympathy is problematical. It is one of the lies we train ourselves to believe in, but “ I’m so sorry ” seems to me as empty a phrase as “ I forgive.” The sympathy that takes an active form, you may judge me by later. It is impossible for me to talk religion with you, for I am one of those originals who will not talk about things of which they know nothing. However, I will tell you that I met at luncheon the other day a Jesuit priest. Whether he was a “ lay ” or

otherwise, I do not know, but he struck me as being a brilliant corporation lawyer. What he said to me over several small brandies, and what I said to him, belongs to a class of professional secrets, but I do say again, he was, while speaking of his Church and its advantages, as well as in its defence, a brilliant corporation lawyer; most of those Jesuits are. You, of course, have nothing of the priest about you, or you could not be my dear old Pal. You are simply a man with a white soul and inclusive brain, trying to turn black souls into a dull gray. Oh, what a waste of time is there, my countrymen! Golden days set in a leaden life — I prefer to string mine on a band of red velvet, something with warmth, colour, and softness.

I am most desirous to know the advantage of having one's "great-grandfather living

in the same street," and why Newport people should be pitied because theirs do not, and West Braintree blessed because theirs do. Our great-grandfathers were not given to "tubbing," and many of them in the same street as oneself might be undesirable. Do not worry about the ancestry of Newport people; they have ancestors, so have tramps, so has every one. The ability to trace your ancestry back through the mire of centuries is about the emptiest glory I know anything about. I never knew a great man, who cared a damn about his great-grandfather; it was the "Great I am" he cared for.

Don't you sneer at an epigram. A good one is the wisdom of all the ages put up in a homœopathic pellet, and don't you think I write you cheery letters out of pure unselfishness. I like to write to you, and I don't believe in cheering people up, for the proc-

ess brings you down to a lugubrious level. It is like the transfusion of blood — good for the recipient, but aging to the giver. It is like the old and young sleeping together. No, sir, I write because I want to.

I have just returned from a visit to my boy's school, where he is absorbing knowledge and developing muscle. It was the occasion of a football match between rival schools. Our school won, and 125 pledges of parental love went voiceless to bed. Do you not suppose they could be satisfied with one "Rah!" instead of nine? My boy said good-bye to me in a whisper that would have done credit to a love-sick maiden. I had a very good chance to send the youngster to a first-class English school, but I think the American father who educates a son in England, whom he expects afterward to live in his native country, is "a

ass." I have seen one or two such exotic specimens, and they were for years after their return both friendless and discontented. By the bye, how is it that the Roman Catholics have no similar schools in this country? I have a friend whose boy has only a choice between a good Roman Catholic school in England, and a comparatively poor school here. I suppose Georgetown and Seton might object to this statement, but they are not similar institutions to those of which I speak.

I spent two nights in Boston, and listened to Boston men talk. Why is it they seem to think that a Boston-born, Harvard-educated man is *ipso facto* a gentleman, while all the rest of the male world must first prove themselves such? The law presumes you innocent until proved guilty. A Boston man subconsciously believes you a cad

until overwhelming evidence compels him reluctantly to admit you are a gentleman.

Did you ever notice how many good things come from the Hub? I wonder can it be that Boston is a pleasant place to leave, and I wonder, oh, I wonder, why it is that, when Boston married men come to New York on business, they wear such a guilty look.

In the dining-room of the Touraine, which is one of the hotels in the sacred city, I saw something I don't want to forget. I saw a girl put her hand up to her mouth, and I have not been altogether sane since. First, the grace of the movement was Hogarth's line of beauty. Second, the hand was the hand of fate, — of many men's fate, — and the mouth was a rose-coloured sketch of her heart — perfect love, infinite tender-

ness, and a marvellously proportioned door to both heart and brains. I should like to have heard that mouth sing "Come, ye disconsolate." I am sure I should not have tarried on the way. Of course I am susceptible, but I am also, so far, preternaturally virtuous.

Can you answer this question, kind sir? Is the marital morality of the Americans due to the men, or the women, or to a lack of passion on the part of both? Men who take a bird's-eye view of life get a better sense of proportion and of the "whyness" of things than I can, who am too close to everything to know the reason of anything. Certain it is that in this country it seldom takes three to carry the matrimonial yoke.

I cannot write you any more to-day, old man, as I am off on a little trip South, and, as the faithful Evans has only been away

from "Perfidious Albion" two months, his idea of packing for Florida is faulty to a degree. He has one trunk already packed full of fur overcoats, ulsters, and wedding garments, and so my cry for once is not Pay, Pay, Pay,

but

Pack, Pack, Pack.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

You may consider the above word "yours" written in indelible ink.

FOURTH LETTER

West Braintree, Mass.

YOU have a good heart, kind sir; do not try to deceive me. Another letter so soon in answer to mine proves that, beyond peradventure. Why should a lazy beggar like you write so often to a lame beggar like me, unless he have a good heart?

When poor Heine was lying helpless, unvisited, almost forgotten, a visitor was announced. "What," he exclaimed, "some one visits me!" When Berlioz was shown into the room, Heine looked at him and said: "Ah, it is you, Berlioz! Well, you were always eccentric!" I trust you will not grow ashamed of being eccentric *à mon intention*. They have had a big medical

gun on from your city to look over the rag-bag of bones who now writes to you. Why is it these medical fellows assume that the rest of us are fools? It is perfectly clear to me that I am doomed, and yet this doctor mixed up a little of his professional gibberish and hope, and left me as uninformed as though I were incapable of understanding, or incapable of bearing, my fate as he saw it. My brother-in-law Bob is as non-committal as a Pythian oracle or a candidate awaiting a nomination. I tell them that Pope was humpbacked, so was King John; Heine was a cripple, and Robert Louis Stevenson was a terrible invalid, and yet no one accused them of having no brains. Why should they make of me a child? It is kindness, no doubt — the rough rule-of-thumb human kindness that babies what it would cherish.

Did I accuse Newport of lacking grandfathers? I meant no such thing. I apprehend, even in my feeble state, that no such mythological illegitimacy is possible even to the self-made man, my dear sir. Perhaps I was coerced into irritability by a call from a Southern lady who is visiting my sister Katharine. Bob brought her over to my pallet to amuse me. She deluged me with her ancestry. It turns out that her mother kept a high-class boarding-house in New Orleans, or Washington, or somewhere, and hence my dissertation on the topic. It is the self-consciousness on the subject that I deprecate. These worldlings, who have the present in their pocketbooks, and the future in the stock-market, pine for a past. To me "it is altogether sausage," as we phrased it in Leipzig; but you will permit me to be amused, my dear old "our-

grandfathers-be-damned " ! The Southern lady harped much upon the idea that I must be very, very lonely. How you herding human beings do waste yourselves upon one another ! Bob, who fritters away an athletic existence in a turmoil of travel, amongst his horses, his dogs, his friends, and his affairs, never enters my room without hinting that my much-aloneness must be the worst of my affliction. How often I hear these people say : " Oh, by the way, I asked so-and-so to dinner to-night, as I heard he was to be all alone." " Terrible condition," they seem to say ; " let no mortal be alone for a single instant ! " I am no hater of my fellows, as you know, but to be alone is not the worst of evils. Association without love is very laborious. Just to rub one indifferent against another indifferent gives no light. I am not a dog that

I must have my nose in some one's hand to be content. To be sure, —

“ I am no such pil'd cynique to believe
That beggarie is the only happinesse ;
Or with a number of those patient fooles
To sing, my mind to me a kingdom is.”

I travel about a good deal upon my coverlet when there are books about me, and, when Bob comes in to tell how well the roan mare goes as the off-side wheeler of his Four, I have been saying my prayers with Stevenson in the South Sea Islands. Pray which of us has travelled farther? Do you know Stevenson's prayers? They are worthy of a place beside the best prayers in the prayer-book; for example: “ Deliver us from fear and favour: from mean hopes and cheap pleasures.” And, “ Purge us from our lurking grudges!” What could be subtler than that? Or this: “ The

day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man; help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces; let cheerfulness abound with industry. Give us to go blithely on our business all this day; bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep." And they pity me, these sheep, because I am alone — I who have been mining in the South Seas! — I who have brought back such nuggets as these! Why, my dear fellow, I am an adventurer, an explorer. It is I, here on my pillows, who have arrived first on the mountaintop, and, turning to the laggards, I cry: *thalassa, thalassa*, the sea, the sea, when a new planet swims into my ken. To send a man to bed, or to start him forth of a morning, with peace-bringing thoughts in

his head, what athlete can do more? Had I sat down to dinner with fourteen people whom I loved not, and eaten fourteen dishes I needed not, and said fourteen things my brain recked not, and yawned myself to bed empty-headed and full-stomached, then that would have been society. But I lay still and alone, with an ache in my back, but none in my head, heart, or belly; I discovered a new planet; then that is to be alone. It is hard to draw the line between too much and too little activity, but I believe the itch to be doing undoes many a man.

But awake, Percy, you are writing to Douglas! I am thinking, my dear social bee, that the above must be rather a hemlockian potion for such a social Socrates as you. Don't drink it, that's all. "It's only me," as my Lindley-Murray-less little niece says at my door.

Do you remember the story of Dionysius I., Tyrant of Syracuse? Like me, he was wont to be prosy; like me, it was his habit to write or read to his courtiers. A certain philosopher of his court criticised a poem of his lord rather harshly, and was forthwith sent to the quarries as a punishment. This punishment was thought severe, and the philosopher was invited to a public banquet to atone for his misbehaviour. Again the tyrant regaled his guests with a poem. Before he had finished reading, the philosopher turned to his guards and said: "Take me back to the quarries!" When I prose too much, turn on me with that: "Take me back to the quarries!" and I will take warning.

But what am I, the worldless one, to write of your ladies with hands and mouths that foreshadow all that is voluptuous? How do

I know why Boston men look guilty in New York? As to this last, I may perhaps — timidly enough — offer a suggestion. Society in Boston is still, you know, something of a family party, while in New York nowadays it may be likened to a very expensive *table d'hôte*. Perhaps your Bostonian is a little shy. Self-consciousness and guilt are worlds apart, but they affect one's manners in much the same way. One may be awkward through unfamiliarity with new surroundings, and the look and air of wanting to escape, which is at the bottom of awkwardness, marks the provincial as well as the thief. It may be that your Boston friends have not been doing anything naughty; they are only wondering what they ought to do. I may be wrong. "Be merciful to me a fool!"

Why are you going South? Are you run-

ning away from yourself, or from somebody else, — or after somebody else?

You must know how delighted I am to hear from your different life. Write me, therefore, when you can, and what you will. Am I not an ideal confessor? I blame little; I listen with interest; I have no temptation to tell. My life's little drama now must be played out with such puppets as my friends and my books will dress for me. Make me thankful, Thou great Dispenser of Events, that I have eyes left, and may read; that this poor hand and arm, too weak to swing a sword or draw a rein, are fit still to wield a pen.

I am, my dear Douglas, a little weaker, I fear, but no less gay, I hope.

PERCY DASHIEL.

FIFTH LETTER

Palm Beach, Florida, January.

MY dear boy, in your last to me there is a bitter note. You tell me with bitterness that you have nothing to be bitter about. This must cease. What has made you so? Is it that, for the first time, you have interested the doctor, and you consider this a bad sign, as you know they never become interested until a patient becomes a "case?" They are like the men who only become excited at a race when the horses turn into the home-stretch. Naturally they think an ounce of prevention "bad business," and "a pound of cure" is worth a page of advertisement in the *Herald*. My experience

is that there is no statement a physician ever makes so hopeful as: "You can't get well." Whenever a physician is positive, he's wrong; it is only when he guesses that sometimes he guesses right. However, there was nothing querulous in your letter, so I will forgive. Of all the notes in life, the most insistent, the most brain-wearing, is the querulous note. It generally begins with "why," and then follows a question that only a fool would ask, and only a fool would answer. You perceive I am writing this from Palm Beach, Florida. I said to myself: "Oh, for a beaker full of the warm South!" and lo! here I am drinking it in copious and joyous gulps.

I loaded myself down with books and papers, entered my stateroom, and read myself into the land of Nod and nosegays. Apropos of the newspapers, would it not be

well for most American morning newspapers to have a P. M. edition, entitled the *Evening Retractor*, wherein the lies in the morning edition might be contradicted? In this way, readers could have their apparently necessary sensation at breakfast, and still go to bed with a modicum of truthful news. I personally hate to go to bed full of lies. Apropos of the books — they were literary pancakes, flat and indigestible. The reason is our unwillingness to see in print a reference to what the purest of us may do frequently, and this makes most of the fiction of the present day a puzzle to write, and nonsense to read. It is like two engineers sitting down to talk about machinery, when they must not mention either electricity or steam. You may speak of the wheels, but you must not refer to what makes them go around.

This place is charming, a lake on one side and an ocean on the other. So, if you have a preference for big things, there is your ocean; if for little things, there is your lake. At any rate, there is your contrast, and contrast, like variety, is the spice of life.

Also I enjoy hotel life occasionally. Its charm is that you meet new people, — the charm of new people is that, until they become old friends, they retain their “company manners.” The cause of domestic friction is the lack of company manners. Have you never been surprised at the irresistible attractiveness of your own wife when you met in society? No! Well, that’s because you never married. The women here must all be the wives of jewellers or pawnbrokers, and their daughters are the gems of their collections.

I never saw so many “creations” in flesh

and blood in my life. This is going to prove a fearsome place to tread the straight and narrow path. If I find it getting too narrow for my footsteps, I'll yell for help, and you must write me an admonitory letter.

The house is full, and you, being a religious man, will be glad to know, so is the church, — not during the service hours, — but during the night, as it is at present the hotel annex.

Imagine hearing the clerk call: "Front! show this gentleman to pew 76. We cannot give you a bathroom, sir, but you may wash in the baptismal font."

You talk a good deal about the pleasure you get from books, but give me human books. Then all the stupid ones are mere sketches, and take no time to read, only the interesting are long. Wouldn't you be glad if this were true of printed matter?

For instance, there is a woman of brains here, who has married a man with an underdone doughnut in his skull. I fear she belongs to the type of woman who, if she ever made any deviation from that straight and narrow path, would do so as the result of ennui rather than inclination. There are such.

Now, enough for this morning, I am going out for a swim either in the ocean or in the pool. How does swimming appeal to a West Braintree man in January? I can see the goose-flesh rise on you; you must look like a raised map.

Later. I have had a swim in the pool, and I have been amused. There was the most entrancing little American maiden there you ever feasted your eyes upon. She was dressed in a bathing-suit, too dainty for a broad-nibbed pen to describe, and as mod-

est as an artist's breeze, that always blows drapery where it will do the most good. She has two cavaliers, evidently undergraduates. One, a near-sighted youth, wore a surtout overcoat lined with silk; he accompanied the maiden into the pool; the other sat and watched and waited, in charge of said overcoat, on the balcony. For a while Aphrodite showed she was to the water born, then, when her companion's back was turned, she swam to the side where "Man afraid of the water" stood, down came a powerful arm, grasped a slender wrist, and Aphrodite stood by his side; a word or two, and she shivered; in a moment his friend's silk-lined surtout was wrapped around her dripping bathing-suit, and they both smiled the smile of the wicked. Down they sat in two chairs, and talked the talk that exhales the perfume of

love. Up and down, and through and through, the water swam the near-sighted man, colder and lonelier, as the minutes flew by, while the pool of water in which the maiden sat grew deeper, enclosed as she was in his Melton coat of cost — of great cost. Suddenly Leander sees her, sees his coat, and, with mighty strokes, reaches her side. A shriek of laughter, and the maiden dives into the pool; the considerate one disappears.

Now how deliciously American that all was! Can you imagine an Englishman ruining a friend's ninety-dollar overcoat in a playful spirit of chivalry? I should like to know that girl, wouldn't you?

I have just received a letter from my wife, or rather a moan — all her letters are moans, as all her mole-hills are mountains, Alps on Andes. She questions me:

“How are you to cross this impassable barrier?” “Walk,” is my answer.

“But suppose you are opposed by a parallelopipedon” (I don’t know what that means, but it sounds big).

“I would crush the ant,” is my answer.

She explains the difference between the parallelopipedon and the ant.

I retort: “I would go around the other side.”

“Ah!” she exclaims, “but there, if you were met by an ichthyosaurus, what would you do?”

“I would crush the ant,” is my answer. She explains once more.

I am silent. Then she cries, and I go out and look upon the Scotch whiskey when it is yellow.

Poor dear, when she goes to heaven, if she has nothing but cumulous clouds to

climb over, she won't get enough exercise.

Then she is so truthful — alas, so truthful. My dear boy, for every-day use, in every-day life, there is such a thing as being too addicted to the deadly truth. Some religious people would give a pill in jam, when they would not disguise the truth to soften a blow.

And now, “in conclusion,” as you clergymen say, I want you to understand that I mean you shall consider yourself of more importance. You are, in the bottom of your heart, disgruntled because, in your present condition, you cannot “do” things. Is it not better to “be” than to “do?” Listen: the Bible says: “John performed no miracles.” It will be the “Johns” you will hear about in the next world; the others you hear about now. Men, who were busy doing

big things according to a little world standard, will then find themselves eclipsed by those who have done little things by God's standard.

I don't offer you sympathy, for sympathy is only sugar-coated pity, and you abhor pity as I do.

Yours as ever,

DOUGLAS.

SIXTH LETTER

West Braintree.

EITHER, my Lothario, you are writing for publication, or you have been to church and stolen the peroration of a sermon. Such, at least, is the impression made upon me by the eloquent close of your last letter. Were it not that your punctuation is of the worst, and my habit of tearing up answered letters well known to you, verily, I should suspect you of literary ambitions. But if you think I am going to die for the sake of an epistolary serial, you are mightily mistaken. In any case, this last letter of yours would play havoc in your home circle if it ever escaped beyond the portals of this room.

It has been concealed under my pillow, and, when I am moved into my chair for the day, I shall burn it and a pastille. The atmosphere here won't stand it. What with your water-nymphs, your husbands with "underdone doughnuts" in their skulls, your flippant dialogue on domestic subjects, and your luxurious Oriental quaffing of beakers of sun-streaked lasciviousness, I am at a loss to know how it ever happened that you are writing to me, and I am writing to you — no one else shall know of it if I can help it. *Ridentem dicere verum, quid vetat?* Are you not preparing for yourself complications, by walking carelessly into a maze in which the paths intertwine so endlessly that, when you are ready to come out, you cannot find a way? It seems to me that I have read of youths of similar *Wein und Weib tendenzen*, who

found their names in large black letters, at the top of a column in the *Tawny Tips from Town*, or some equally pornocratic sheet, one fine morning. I dislike to think of you in that predicament.

I admit the charm of studying "human" books, but it is, on the whole, a lazy habit. Who would go botanising without first reading up on the subject; or who would claim to be an entomologist on the strength of having watched the movements of a few beetles? *On étudie les livres en attendant qu'on étudie les hommes*; it's true, but at least one studies the books first. I incline to think that you gentlemen who proclaim yourselves collectors of *Papiliones fem.* for scientific purposes, are humbugs, after all. One good woman is the solution of all the social problems, and it is time wasted to know more. If I were you, I

should pack up my corks and pins, fly-net and bottle of ether, and make tracks for home. You are not enlarging your experience down there; you are merely making your liver less amenable, — particularly if you are drinking whiskey in that latitude.

It makes me shiver, as you suggest, to think of bathing in the open air these days. Our roads are deep with snow; the fences and trees have put on their ermine, and all nature is as stiff as though it had a conscience, and were reading your last letter. The moral contrast is as great as that of nature. There is joy in New England, but it is never unconfined. I remember, after my sabbatical year in Europe, coming directly home from Italy. The absence of laughter, chatter, gaiety, gesticulation in the streets seemed very strange to me at

first. The self-consciousness and self-constraint of my neighbours in West Braintree touched me. I felt that they were sad. I felt tempted to slap Ebed on the back, to poke Nehemiah in the ribs, to crack a joke with Solomon, — all neighbours of mine, — bid them be of good cheer, that the Day of Judgment had been postponed. But this gloom is only skin-deep, as is, by the way, much of the gaiety of the Latin races. These Yankees are great optimists. It is they who settled Kansas, they who made the backbone of Chicago's prosperity, they who built the first great transcontinental railroads, they who founded the first universities, they who fought the war of 1812, and they who carried through the Revolution and the Rebellion. You would find Ebed and Solomon and Nehemiah dull companions on the edge of a swimming-

pool in Florida, but you would find them most dependable on the edge of any dangerous or laborious enterprise. And their women are sober, silent, and fertile, three most desirable, if not the most desirable, attributes in woman. You idlers, with your one or two chicks, your hurrying-skurrying wives, playing Cleopatra to any number of Antonys, what are they and their softness to these and their hardness? It amuses me to look over the names of your notables in New York, and to see how they nearly all come from country stock. Your great banker, of Connecticut breeding; your one-time governor and Vice-President of the United States, the son of a poor parson; your governor — at the time I write — a one-time ice-man from a country town; your parsons, your lawyers, your financial magnates, your physicians, your engineers,

your contractors, your architects, nearly all men from the country. They had no flirting mothers, no nymph-baiting fathers. The Almighty is a great socialist. It appals me that any body of men should attempt to rearrange the wealth and power of the world better than He does it. Money and luxury are their own danger. Instead of great wealth being a problem, it takes care of itself, by steadily and rapidly devouring its possessors. Pain is part of the permanent destiny of mankind, and all attempts to avoid it by living softly, by sheltering oneself from the common storms of humanity, only weaken, and soften and finally slay those who adopt that attitude toward life. This Cleopatratizing of the Antonys of the world seems to be God's, or nature's, way of distributing the good things of life. Unless life is hard, we poor

humans somehow lose our mental, moral and physical muscle. Unless there is much to overcome, our power of overcoming becomes enfeebled; thus do families languish and waste away and their wealth and power go to the next lot of barbarians who capture their Rome. The great problem in life is not to make it easy, but to make it just hard enough to keep our best abilities in proper training. Few men can do that, either for themselves or their children. There being no driving power of necessity, most men do little, or at any rate, not enough. Men who have worked their way up through perils and dangers and deprivations, go about it — foolishly enough — to make life too easy for their sons, and their sons do not profit, but more often suffer from this.

“ Nil sine magno
Vita labore dedit mortalibus,”

writes Horace, — rather a soft gentleman himself, but his philosophy is sound.

I have been reading this letter, and I fancy I can hear you saying: “Take me back to the quarries!” You see, you are my congregation now, and, like the Swiss hero, you receive all the lances in your one bosom.

I have been reading Stevenson’s Life, by Balfour, Green — of the Short History of the English People — by Leslie Stephen, and — not so far away as it seems — “Don Quixote.” Strange that there should still be superficial fools who think “Don Quixote” is a satire upon knight-errantry. It is invigorating to know of such men as Stevenson and Green — both invalids, both pushing death on one side with a smile, that they might work a little longer; both accomplishing great tasks that it would

stagger most strong men to contemplate. My poor old back gets a bit straighter as I read, and it is borne in upon me that I am a puling thing to whimper or complain. But they never had a taste of the physical fulness of life as I had. It is the memory of my freedom that at times makes me restless in this physical slavery. The pen seems a poor plaything after one has held a gun, a whip, a sword. But no more of me. Indeed, I beg pardon for so much of me. What about you? What became of the myopic gentleman's surtout? Is it the water-lily, or the spouse of him with the cephalic damp doughnut? How is the whiskey in the land of the Seminoles? When are you coming back? When are you writing me again? soon, I trust. We are all well. Bob and Katharine are now in their town house, and I see them when

they run out here for a Sunday. I miss the children. I am off to Spain presently with Sancho. *Au revoir!*

PERCY DASHIEL.

SEVENTH LETTER

DEAR BOY:—

Your defence of the New Englander is convincing, but it does not interest me; at present nothing interests me except myself, but your three most desirable attributes of women made me roar. Why, man, I expect to find them “sober;” I should hate to find them “silent” and “fertile.” That’s as you like. My idea is beauty, tenderness, and sterility. I will not disappoint you—I admit I have a longing “to go back to the quarries.”

“I walk down de street
Wif ma gun in ma han’—
Nobody knows how bad I am.
I look out de window and I look on de shelf—
I’m so bad I’m a-skeered of myself.”

That's my condition exactly, so no words of wisdom from you or any one else will keep me from enjoying to the full this one wee holiday.

I was out walking this morning, and I heard a negro wench singing; here is the refrain:—

“What do I care for your words of wisdom?
What do I care for your house and lan’?
What do I care for your gold and silver?
What I want is a han’some man.”

There's philosophy for you; change the sex of the wished-for one, and you have my sentiments.

Do you know Jno. J. Ingalls's “Opportunity?” Here it is:—

“OPPORTUNITY

“Master of human destinies am I!
Fame, love, and fortune on my footsteps wait.
Cities and fields I walk. I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote, and passing by
Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late
I knock unbidden once at every gate!

If sleepy, wake ; if feasting, rise before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate,
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death : but those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury, and woe,
Seek me in vain, and uselessly implore.
I answer not, and I return no more !”

This is my opportunity, and I do not propose to “doubt or hesitate.” Just at present I am consulting my own wishes, which is equivalent to consulting one’s health. People who think of others are apt to die young. They are known as “shining marks.” However, as yet I have done nothing wrong. To misquote Disraeli: “I am inebriated with the exuberance of my own virtuosity.”

Some people serve simply as loam to develop the soil of other people’s lives. I have been rather a successful loam for some time. Permit me to blossom on my own

account for a moment. So now you are answered.

However, whatever happens to me won't happen here, as I intend leaving to-morrow for Aiken, South Carolina, where I know many people. People make a place; that is, they do to gregarious birds like myself, and here I am a bit lonely.

Aiken.

I have been here a week, and too busy to write. To live through a winter at Aiken, you need as many lives as a cat, there is so much to do, but it also means rejuvenescence; it means the unloading of a few years upon the back of Time. The winter climate is May, well peppered with December. Life here is above all things healthy, and the women, God bless 'em, are superb. The new woman's heart can take

care of itself, the new woman's brains need burnishing, for the new woman's health is occupying most of her time and attention. In olden days women took medicine; now they take exercise. They used to put colour on their cheeks with the tip of a fox's tail; now they chase the fox's tail over the hills and far away, and find their colour in the rushing wind rather than in a box. They used to swing in hammocks; now they balance themselves on wheels. Forty years ago, a woman who did not scream at the sight of a gun and say, "Take the horrid thing away," would have been considered untrue to the traditions of her sex; now many of them shoot admirably. They row, ride wheels, and golf, and many women in society could thrash their husbands. This is not a pretty thought, but true. Health and strength add to a woman's at-

tractions. Fresh outdoor exercise does not, as some suppose, interfere with womanly tenderness. Watch one of these modern Amazons with her children, and you discover that a bright eye and a clear complexion is not incompatible with womanly love. Then, in the evening, when she has changed her tailor-made gown for something as pretty and effeminate as anything her grandmother ever wore, you find that, though she has shared your sports, she won't share your heart, — for she takes it all.

Do you remember my telling you in one of my letters of a girl I saw at the Touraine in Boston, whose grace of movement had left me slightly daft? Well, she is here. I saw her first when lunching at Wilcox's. She is not exactly a girl. She is married, and her name is — well, never mind her name. I may write to you more fully about

her if I know you cannot trace her, for, mark you, that woman will be a factor in my life.

Very few men live their lives influenced only by one woman. In the book of every man's life there has been more than one heroine. Man is many-sided, a pivoting prism, a different side presenting itself to the world as the years roll by. The woman who appeals to him at one time does not at another. His experiences may not be progressive, but are certainly varied.

I have met her, and also her husband. The Creator was short of good clay when he made that man, so he made him of ooze, and let him harden in the sun. He affects to be clever and a cynic. It has been said that a cynic is "a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." That is the being in question to a T. The

other evening Mrs. B., as I shall call her, came to a little dance in a gown that looked like a spider's web be-diamonded with dew. It was bewitching. Turning to her husband in my presence, she said: "Now, Edward, you must admit this is becoming."

Looking at her with a curl of his lip, he answered:

"There are some women who, in the eyes of their husbands, could wear no gowns so becoming as their shrouds."

A quotation from a man's lips is often a better description of him than pages of written matter. So now you know him.

I saw her again at golf the next morning. She is as refreshing in the morning as she is ravishing at night. She told me she had had "a ride, a cold bath, and a breakfast, and she felt like health personified." Now, you old West Braintree misogynist, let me

tell you. She may have had her ride, she may have had her breakfast, but she never could have had a *cold* bath, for the reflecting water would have turned warm at her approach.

Enough, you think me crazy — well, I am.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

EIGHTH LETTER

West Braintree.

DEAR DOUGLAS: —

I have your letter from Aiken — and a pain in my back. Both remind me forcibly that there is much to be said for Haeckel's theory that we are only ephemerides, after all. He holds that we are made literally from the dust of the earth. If he knew you, he would preserve you in alcohol, as proof of it. Flesh we are, and flesh we must gloat over; dust we are, and to dust we must return, sing you. I wonder if your gay humour is not a cloak for something bitter. When ambitious men, or able men, have a cover put on them that prevents their going up, they spread out instead. The

more one spreads, the thinner one gets, until we become what is known as superficial — superficial in our likes, in our dislikes, in our work, in our loyalties even, until it seems easy to break through anywhere, so thin are all the barriers. My dear boy, you don't want to become like that! I call you "boy," for any man is a boy who remains as inconsequential as you are.

A minister came to see me the other day. He had been at one time over a large and prominent city church. There was a quarrel, backbiting, recriminations, and he was shouldered out. He is now in a small country church. He whined and criticised, and deplored his fate to me. Poor me! Of my troubles not a word, of his a sea of words. Of the miseries of others no thought; with his own his brain was reeking. Now when God Almighty whips a

man, He does it because he goes too slow, and ought to go faster; or because he goes too fast, and should not; but in any case, the whipping comes because the lashed one deserves it, and when I get mine, I go whimpering to no man — I hope you do not. The Reverend Mr. X. had his poor little ecclesiastical house of cards pulled down, — he must perforce shed his tears upon every brother man's waistcoat.

His ambition flattened out and become thin, he becomes sour. Your ambitions flattened out a little, and you become gaily indifferent. Neither is good or manly. Though I admit, strictly to you, that I always prefer the methods of the world in such matters to the methods of the religious. Lying here, I think a deal of matters that others pass by, because so much of their time goes in action. I often wonder at the

rather effeminate immorality of the cloth. This man I mention would not steal, nor get drunk, nor commit adultery, nor stoop to fisticuffs at midnight in the street. But he was not ashamed to backbite, to pile his disappointments on another's disappointments, to hug his miseries, that he might the more easily peddle them when customers came. He exaggerated; he was not strictly truthful. The weaker vices were all his. He was well within the law in his crimes, and still, I thought, more guilty than more than one red-blooded rascal I have known. It is curious how despicable a man can be, and yet in the letter break none of the commandments. I don't know that this is good ethical doctrine for such as you, but, like other old grannies, I suppose I have a weakness for the frailties of those I love. "There never was a rogue,

who had not a salvo to himself for being so," writes Richardson in "Clarissa." I make no doubt that if you are ever put to it, you will not need me to invent excuses for you. But for God's sake — and I use the phrase reverently and advisedly — don't whine if you ever do get a licking! That ought to be the difference between a real man and a make-believe man, that the one does not, and the other does, cry when he is hurt. All the professions which make a demand upon a man for much self-expression, such as that of the actor, the public orator, the preacher, even the artist who expresses himself with clay or paint, seem to inculcate an unmanly lack of modesty. Such people are dearer to women than to men. The habit of giving way to one's feelings in preaching, or acting, or public speaking generally, — permissible enough

on occasions when the duties of the profession demand it, — breeds a temperament that permits itself the luxury of public confession when such self-betrayal is eminently undignified. One gets into the way of asking an unfair share of other people's attention and sympathy. As I grow older, and especially now that I am at the mercy of those who come to see me, I note, with wonder, how my brother men are wrapped closely in the matter of their own interests, and most of them would fain have you cover yourself with a corner of their garment while they are with you. It is a difficult thing, I know, to draw the line between that necessary selfishness which underlies the law of the survival of the fittest, which no man can break and live, and the unbecoming selfishness which is always rude, and often cruel. It were a work of

supererogation to try to draw that line in every word and action of one's life, and yet I cannot help thinking that it is he who comes nearest to it who is most the gentleman. My clerical friend, despite his office, was clearly not a gentleman. And now, "my son in God," as the ancient ecclesiastical phrase is, — and what a beautiful phrase it is, — one may, I think, carry flippancy and triviality to the point where one becomes effeminate, though in a diametrically opposite way from my clerical friend. Though self-confession is bad, the cloak of a false gaiety and a cynical good humour is, it seems to me, but a poor habit of mind, and a mean habit of body. It is just as much a sign of weakness, the one as the other. Both mark the man who is dominated by the world. "The world is in the saddle," — the world that you and I ought

to ride. If I were as fond of epigrams as you and Rochefoucauld, I might say that one must ride the world even to be a man at all, and that one must ride it gracefully to be a gentleman.

Alas, that I should be forever preaching to you, but I have never known a congregation needing it more than you, my parish of one. One of my old friends, when I read him by the basketful, and not by pièce-meal, as now I must, George Herbert by name, wrote that "All preaching's folly," and I suppose at bottom he was right. The only competent criticism of any man is to *be* better than he is. And that, I take it, is what makes so much preaching folly indeed. I can hear you scoff at the worldly advice of a broken-vertebraed celibate, whose *tour du monde* is from bed to chair and back again. But those who are de-

barred from committing sins of the flesh may still commit sins of the spirit in plenty. By the way, Bob has taken Cynthia to town, and he and Katharine are “bringing her out,” whatever that means. So far as I can make out, Bob now has two establishments on his hands, — one here in the country, and one in town, and he and Katharine are as much buried in the details of running them as though they were partners in a large business house. Bob’s mail alone, he tells me, is a daily avalanche, and Katharine, poor sister, has two cooks, two kitchen maids, two everything, to manœuvre through the labyrinth of life. Bob, who has a shelf full of Fairman Rogers, and Underhill, and Howlett, and the Lord knows who else, on “Driving,” etc., etc., came to me, wringing his hands in despair, because the cab company turned him out

with both coachman and footman with exactly the same number of buttons on their greatcoats. You and I, poor fools, do not know that the footman should have six buttons on the tails of his coat, and the coachman only four, but five buttons on the front of his coat, and the coachman six. Thus, you see, there are multitudinous troubles in life of which we have no inkling even. We are spared something by our ignorance. There is a fourth dimension of space in etiquette into which we have never penetrated. Think how complicated life may be to those who know so much! I rather admire Bob, though, for his thoroughness. He has a dogged way of getting to the root of even trivial matters, that promises great things if he is ever confronted with a big problem. There's a young man who rides his world — such as it is — for you! But

I know you like him as much as I do. I will tell you more of them some day. I want to write "The Log of a Débutante," but Cynthia and Katharine, Cynthia's mamma, tell me that the theme is too intricate and altogether beyond my powers.

Don't make an ass of yourself just *pour passer le temps*. I repeat the cry of the man who peddles candies through the cars before the train starts: "Remember the little ones at home!" I am,

Yours (don't make me less so),

PERCY DASHIEL.

NINTH LETTER

DEAR PERCY:—

I have not written you for three weeks, because I have not had the stomach for it; your last letter was so ponderously didactic, so out of proportion to any little fault I may have committed in your eyes, that it seemed like Jove choosing his heaviest bolt of lightning with which to kill a little child. You say, "For God's sake, don't whine if you ever get a licking." I pray what has ever led you to suppose I would whine? There are other consolations in the hour of trouble besides whining, religion, or drink. I'm not likely to take to any of the above three. You inveigh against selfishness, and yet admit you find it diffi-

cult to "cover yourself with the garments of others when they are with you." In other words, it would seem you are so wrapped up in yourself that it is painful for you to wear the sackcloth of others for a moment, while they rest. Perhaps this is a form of selfishness—who knows? Take Charles Reade's advice, and put yourself in his place.

One more reason why I have not written before, is because I could only write on one subject, and of that I know you would disapprove, but, if you care to hear from me at all, it must be of my ravings, for surely am I possessed of a devil. Again I say frankly, I have no respect for the opinion of a clergyman in regard to temptation and sin, of which he knows nothing except by hearsay. What would you think of a doctor who attempted a case of which he knew

nothing except what others had told him? Clergymen are always wondering why people persist in vice that they admit is killing them, physically and mentally. They have never discovered that the habit of vice increases as the will to resist decreases.

Therefore, in so far as this new something, that has come into my life and changed me from a sodden lump of clay into a conductor of electricity, is concerned, I propose to retain it so long as it will stay, — and you know, old man, I am nothing if not obstinate, — all weak people are. I rather admire obstinacy for this reason. There are two sorts of force in individuals — one comes from obstinacy and one from a conscious sense of right, but for every-day use give me the former; it can stand the wear and tear of argument and a flood of light, but a mere conscious sense of right,

from the very intelligence that prompted its deductions, permits itself to waver and doubt.

My friendship with Mrs. B. has widened and deepened, and is only bounded now by the horizon of my life. The intimate friendship of one good woman is often to a man a complete recompense for all the bad women in the world, and all the dull ones, too, which is saying much more.

With Mrs. B., it is a case of the marriage of innate goodness to intellect, with the one child, Beauty, as a result. Here beauty is the visible expression of herself; it is logical, therefore convincing. Where she is the air is charged with electricity; you inhale new life; your dead ambitions rise from their graves and are born again. Your sympathies for others, atrophied for years, become strong and lusty once more

and seek a practical outlet. Of course this atmosphere seems good to me, and I drink it in with long, deep breaths, —

“ For when the sun is hot as fire,
And sky one burning soft sapphire,
One doesn't drink in little sips.”

You see, I have been touched by a fairy wand, and changed from a pumpkin into a man. However, do believe I mean no wrong in all this, — you *must* believe it, because you *can*, as you have a trained intellect, which is simply one that, in religion, law, or politics, makes itself believe what it likes.

Yours impenitently,

DOUGLAS.

TENTH LETTER

West Braintree, Mass.

DEAR DOUGLAS:—

I have your extraordinary letter, written after an interval of nearly a month. If this is a mere midsummer's madness, or perhaps, a melodrama arranged with your well-known dramatic ability for the amusement of the backless, I thank you for your pains. If, on the other hand, your last letter was a serious composition, I am aghast. I have never missed my poor broken pedestrian machinery so much as now, for I should "chuck" any other duty to follow you, to draw you from the quicksands into which you are light-heartedly walking. May I have a vision for a moment? I see

a woman, probably an unusually attractive woman, for you have known too many to be thrown off your balance by passing fancies, tied presumably to a husband whom she has ceased to respect, or who interests her no longer. You appear, — may I be frank, and say, — somewhat weary of your own home affairs. You are both more or less in a receptive condition for this kind of contagious disease. Of her talk, I know nothing. Of yours, I can guess that it leads first to amusement, then interest, then confidence on her part, and then sympathy on yours. Sympathy, as we all know, is but the ability to surround ourselves with an atmosphere in which others find themselves at their best. A lower form of the same thing is the fish that can colour the water about himself. This Mrs. B. has coloured the air about her to suit your mental and

moral complexion. You are happy; you feel yourself to be understood; you rejoice in an easy working of your moral machinery. Here at last is the medium in which, or by which, you are to be another man, to become your best, to do yourself credit. The same is true of Mrs. B., as you call her. She no doubt swims delightedly in the balmy waters that you, on your part, have coloured for her. Matters progress until two people bring themselves to believe that outside of this atmosphere life is impossible, or, at least, unbearable. If we go too far up in the air in a balloon, we cannot breathe; if we go down too far under water, there again we cannot breathe. There is one level for each of us where his lungs work most freely, give most oxygen to the blood, and where brain and body are at their best. It is true in exactly the same

way of man as a moral animal. There is an atmosphere where the moral man breathes most easily, most freely. It is hard—I will go farther and say it is the tragedy of life—when either a man or a woman finds himself confined for life, or until death us do part, in an atmosphere too high, or too low. You will agree to all this, my dear boy, but now I fear that we shall part company.

No one person makes this atmosphere. The goddess can throw her cloud about the hero, and make him safe and happy for a time, but he must become visible again sometime and fight his battles for himself against or gods or men. Are you not deceiving yourself? Is this woman not deceiving herself? You are comparatively young, she is probably younger. Is this passion of yours—how, by the way, do

such things come so lightning quick? — just this mere atmosphere in which you are for the moment so happily at home, or is it, do you think, the blood, and the bone, and the heat of the heart of the rest of your life? For mind you, the world will come down upon you both with crushing force if matters go much farther. The world is right, too, in the main. The world must insist upon a certain dreary level of morality to keep itself clean at all. It can make no exceptions, it cannot and must not deal with exceptions and differences and details, it can only be safe in dealing with human morals in big blocks. I said the world was right — so. it is, in the main, though I admit, frankly enough, that there are cases where the individual has asserted himself against the canons of society and done right. I forgave him, you forgave him, but

the world is much too busy to go minutely into each case. It is an awful thing, therefore, for any man to set himself apart, to make an exception of himself, and to trample upon the moral laws, and received social usages of his generation and say: "I am the captain of my soul." Very few men are fit to be their own, and their only commander-in-chief. In the case of a woman, all this applies to her with redoubled force, and with crushing, humiliating power generally. Mind you, my lad, you may swing your sword, and say, "I am the captain of my soul," and throw off the bonds and fetters of the world's social and moral life, and perhaps do it very well for yourself — but how about her? You have a sword, but she only has a parasol. You take upon yourself not merely a double

burden, but a veritable task of Sisyphus to roll your moral life up-hill again.

If you have reached a point in this affair where your honour is involved, I mean by that, if this woman loves you, thinks her happiness depends upon you, then how sorry I am for you! how my heart bleeds for you! what a terrible problem, what a dreadful temptation, you have introduced into your life!

Believe me, I am hurling no thunderbolts at peccadilloes, I am making no mountains groan for the miscarriage of a mouse. I am truly and deeply troubled, as one of your oldest friends, as one of those who will insist upon understanding and forgiving you,—no other friend is worth while,—at what I fear may call out from all who care for you the very last shreds of their loyalty.

Think none the less of me, if, as a professional moralist, I have written to you nothing of professional morality — I cannot stoop to discuss divorce and law-breaking. These are nothing beside the mistake that ruins a man's heart, and sends his very soul through the court of bankruptcy. These lower levels of law are not for men of spirit and moral dignity. The policeman is nothing to me — I am not walking the narrow path to escape his club. But my own ideal carries a weightier weapon than any policeman's club — my self-respect sits on the judge's bench with a power to make me miserable that no magistrate can wield. It is so with you — I am writing to you as a gentleman: some people might not give you that title under the circumstances; I know better than that — I know how an impulse, a rush of passion, may involve

a man in then doing what under other circumstances he might not and would not do.

To win a woman's love and then tell her it must not be, is a million times more immoral, more cur-like, than to accept deposits of money and then declare the bank insolvent. It is true no man should offer love or accept love when he cannot count upon himself to go to the end. But once it is done, then a higher law than that of one's own safety or comfort obtains and carries the case out of the earthly courts into the heaven where a man's gods sit in judgment upon him, Conscience, Courage, Truth. You have made a mistake, a horrible mistake, a mistake that may wrap in its folds not only Laocoön, but all his children; so be it, but I want no friend of mine to be a coward, for that is worse than a mistake, that is damnation. We could only

put you in a moral asylum then, still pitying you, yes, but with no respect left.

I may not have made myself clear. I may have done you no good by writing to you thus out of my heart, and without professional and almost without moral prejudices, — certainly with all my social prejudices laid absolutely on one side in your favour, — but I am rather bruised in my sympathies by this affair of yours; I am torn by the necessity I see of keeping myself now, of all times, your friend, of making myself an asylum whither you may come if worse things ensue, of keeping myself unspotted from the world's mere harsh rule-of-thumb judgment, which is bound to deal clumsily with you, and oh, so cruelly with her!

Our own life here is much the same — I ought to be thankful that I am not in a gar-

ret with my broken back — for it is a foregone conclusion now that I shall never be well again — instead of here, with every comfort and even every luxury. We have our episodes though. The other night, Bob's boy, my nephew, came back from school for the holidays. With some of his schoolmates the other night he went to the play. Bob and Katharine waited up for him. Twelve o'clock came and no boy. Katharine got more and more nervous. Finally Bob got a cab and set sail in search of him. He rang the door-bells at friends' houses where all the servants had gone to bed; he went to the theatre, the theatre was closed; he was prepared to send out a general alarm from the central police station, when he returned home to find the boy, who had been taking his various friends home in a cab to different parts

of town. Bob's language would never have been admitted even to the Apocrypha. Of course it was a wet night and Bob got wet physically and morally, and swears he will put a ball and chain on the boy's leg. He has his trials. He quotes lugubriously the Frenchman's witty remark: *Je n'ai qu'un domestique et pourtant je suis mal servi*, over his present phalanx of servants in the two houses. I tell him that all his grumbling is a mere affectation, a sort of Greek chorus to his personal achievements. He found a new game-pie, at some club or other, not long ago, and promptly had one manufactured for me of the circumference of a barrel-head, and proposed my lunching off it plus some Burgundy. I did my best, and was ill for forty-eight hours after. You know, or perhaps you don't, that I have been moved to the town house, and

rejoice in the *va et viens* of this bustling family.

When are you coming north? Why do you not stop over in Washington and make the acquaintance of the new administration and tell me about it all? In any event, write soon again and count upon me, poor me! if that be any comfort to you, always.

Yours,

PERCY DASHIEL.

ELEVENTH LETTER

Aiken, South Carolina.

DEAR PERCY: —

I am not aware that in my last letter I made any confession to you that I was “in love” with any one. I remember referring to a friendship, that was all. Fearing, however, you may look upon this statement as a reflection on your own perspicacity, I make haste to say now, that I am “hopelessly and madly in love.” I believe the above is the customary phraseology.

Your last letter hurts — why don't you temper the wind to the shorn lamb, for I am shorn of everything that appeals to you and revelling in everything that appeals to me. Never give to a patient too much

truth at once. When one takes poison, if one takes too much, one throws it off.

Your theory that I am acting as a gentleman should not, is to my mind puerile. Just at present, and perhaps for the first time in my life, I am true to myself and my best instincts. Would you have me, like the slothful servant, bury my talent in the earth? No; at present I am out at interest, and when I appear before my Lord I shall be rewarded for having increased in the knowledge of all things good in His sight. Truly am I now in the "Kingdom of Heaven," for I am "as a man travelling in a far country." Never was I so proud of myself as I am now, my conscience is like a ball of crystal.

One's first duty is to be true to oneself, the second is to be true to others.

Permit me also a vision. I see a man,

introspective, selfish, and cynical, with a heart like a hickory-nut, going about doing his duties, according to the laws conventional, in a perfunctory way — despised of himself and of the gods, a man whose life was so empty, that he fell so low as at times to feel pity for himself. A few months later he meets a woman who has for him the key of all the heaven there ever is on earth, and lo! the man looks upward not downward, looks outward not inward, looks forward not back. The misery of the world, which was but a distant humming in his ears, becomes a mighty roar; he longs to be up and doing Christ's work, for love of himself is changed to love for others. Has that man worsened, think you? Is the bare tree of winter more acceptable in your eyes than when it puts forth its best, under a compelling sun?

Bah! Here I am apologising for the one glory of my life. A great passion is its own excuse.

And now, old boy, please don't argue any more; accept my present condition and point of view as a fact. My sweet old grandmother used to recite this verse:—

“ When things are done and past recalling,
’Tis folly then to fret or cry ;
Prop up a rotten house when falling,
But when it’s down e’en let it lie.”

Learn this by heart.

Dear Lord! I am so happy, and what a queer sensation happiness is. I never even had a bowing acquaintance with it before, but now we are on intimate terms. Of course there are moments when hell intervenes, but that is when I don't expect to see her for twenty-four hours. As you see, I am as Carlyle described Monckton Milnes,

the "President of the Heaven-and-Hell Amalgamation Company." Whether you deserve it or not, I propose to continue writing about her to you.

Doubtless you would like me to retrace my steps — can I honestly do so? Let me try to reproduce for you the scene that took place between us yesterday, then you can answer the question for yourself.

We had ridden some miles from the house and were deep in the cathedral-like woods; I suggested we should dismount and tie our horses to a tree, and take a stroll, which we did.

"How I love flowers," she was saying. "I know they are endowed with life and have a language of their own. Don't you remember how Tennyson in 'Maud' makes them talk, 'and the lily whispers I wait, I wait.' By the bye, did you ever read a

little story about some flowers in a dying girl's room nursing her back to life? They took turns in watching, wishing, and praying. One would wake when the other folded its leaves and slept. 'She is one of us,' they cried. 'She must be saved,' and so these little flowers gave up their lives for hers."

"It's a very pretty idea," I said, "but I should hate to depend upon a flower to give me my medicine regularly, to shake my pillows, or run for the doctor. If I am ill, please see that I have a trained nurse; she may be as pretty as the fairest flower if you like; but I should prefer to trust my worthless life to her, than to a well-wishing lily of the valley."

At first, her eyelids drooped with disappointment; then, raising them, she looked up in my face, saying:

“For shame! Mr. Dayton, for shame! Have you no poetic feeling?”

“Not where illness is concerned,” I answered. “An illness from which you recover is simply a dip into the Valley of Death. You come out on top of the far mountain, once, twice, perhaps; then you take another dip and you remain in the valley. There is nothing poetical about death. It is horribly practical. To me it is the end.”

“And to me,” she whispered, “the beginning.”

“But come,” I continued, “this conversation is out of place on such a morning. Let’s talk of love and life.” Then in a lower voice, I added: “Shall we talk of love?”

“Yes,” she murmured, “what is it?”

The sudden frankness of this question,

and its unexpectedness struck me as humorous and changed my mood like a flash.

"Love," I laughingly replied, "is a tidal wave of feeling which drowns the intelligence of a man and woman."

She looked puzzled for a moment, and then asked:

"Is that all you believe it to be?"

"No, not all. I believe a man's capacity to love a good woman is generally the only good thing about him. I believe a man's love for a woman takes its colouring from the woman he loves and that a man's love for you would be a great white shaft of dazzling light."

Her eyes became sapphire seas and surely the blood in her veins ran warmer. But before she spoke again, her old tranquillity came back, and she asked:

"Do you believe to love is a duty?"

Again I felt a shock; this time I felt more irritated than amused.

So I answered: "Love is the antithesis of duty; it is a wild caprice; the very essence of its being is independence of will. Duty is the reverse. Any love which has a large percentage of duty in it has a large percentage of dead matter that checks its growth. I fear that God made you to be loved rather than to love. Our earthly affections are made of sterner stuff than you are capable of."

"I don't know whether you are right or wrong," she said, "but I do know that there are moments when my whole character seems waiting to change, in answer to a few words spoken by some one; I know not by whom."

"Then, I shall be your Knight of the Holy Grail and search the wide world over

to find the words that shall prove an open-sesame to your heart."

"God's own music," I heard her murmur.

She looked like a flower unfolding itself for the first time to drink in the warmth of the sun. She looked like a lily changing to a rose. Shyly she raised her eyes to mine and said:

"Was the Knight of the Holy Grail gone long? If so, don't go; perhaps you might find the right words here."

Then the soft singing of the pines ceased, the checkered spots of sunlight on the path stopped dancing, and nature stood still and quiet, and watched with love and admiration the unfolding of this gentle heart. It knew that of all the wondrous changes it wrought in the world, as from seed to tree, from darkness to light, there was nothing

so radiantly beautiful as the dawn of love in a pure woman's heart.

I stopped and faced her, took her fragile white hand in mine, and in a voice husky with emotion, said: "I know three words I might say. They may be the right ones, but should they be the wrong, my days would be all nights, my life all gray, my hopes all dead."

Her head bent forward, but from between her lips I heard the words:—

"Knights were always courageous, were they not?"

Then with no uncertain voice, but loudly and proudly I cried, "I love you!"

And a soft echo came back, "And I you."

Once again the pines sang, the sunlight danced, and all nature bounded ahead for joy. To me the world seemed suddenly full of vibrant music that shook all my senses

into life as they had never known life before, and centred them on one being. To me the universe had reduced itself to one woman. The right words had been spoken, the open-sesame found.

When I leaned forward and kissed her, Peace took Love by the hand and they passed together into my heart and left no room for fear.

Answer me the question, — shall I retrace my steps?

Possibly you wonder how I can write you so fully about anything so personal, but remember, to you, she will always be a creature of my imagination, you will never know her, never even see her, so I feel guilty of no breach of confidence; besides, when burdens become too heavy they must be shared, even the burden of joy. My

happiness is too great for me to bear alone. She is the glint of light at the end of my mental vista. Whatever line of thought I look down I see her smiling, intelligent face at the end, with a knowing look, which seems to say: "Oh, why waste words! I know what you would say before you speak," and I, soul-parched man that I am, revel in the fact that at last I am anticipated in my thoughts.

Man, — I worship her; if I had as many sides as you can make combinations of figures she would appeal to them all. I would rather kiss the tips of her fingers, her very nails, than the responsive lips of a houri. To-day, what took place between us, was to me a religious service. In the reed-like top of a giant pine beneath which we stood, the wind was busy singing in a

monotone;—it was the Muezzin of the West calling the forest to prayer.

Again I ask you—shall I retrace my steps?

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

TWELFTH LETTER

Aiken, South Carolina.

DEAR PERCY:—

I am writing you again without waiting for an answer from you as I have an indigestion of news. I have news to shed and am prepared to shed it now. Listen. We have here what we call “dove drives.” Some few miles out of Aiken a big field is baited with the favourite food of the amorous dove. When the news is communicated to the scattered birds by the unselfish discoverer they concentrate in great numbers. The following day your particular dove drives you out there, and many others do the same, perhaps twenty or thirty couples.

The field is surrounded, and the birds, frightened from their feast, begin to fly wildly at the sound of the first gun. Then if you have ever been in a battle, the memory seems a silence. Such a bing-whanging you never heard. Your particular dove becomes excited and cries:

“Oh, let me try! I must shoot one.” You hand her your gun ready loaded and cocked, carefully placing the stock in her hand; she is suddenly seized by fear, and says:

“I can’t, I don’t dare, here comes one, take it, — quick!” and accurately pointing the muzzle at your abdomen returns you the weapon, provided you have nerve enough to accept it and are not abdomenless at the time. After killing anywhere from four to six hundred of these little minnows of the air, you sit down to a luncheon

that would try the powers of a Hans Christian Andersen ogre.

Yesterday Mrs. B. drove me out, and Mr. B., who is *persona non grata*, notwithstanding his good looks, with every woman here, drove out alone. Coming back, our buggy broke down, but as we were nearly home we decided to walk the rest of the way. Mr. B. was following close behind, so when we got out, he did also, and joining us, said he too would walk.

He made some sneering remark about his wife's lack of pluck so far as a gun was concerned as compared with some of the other women present that day. I saw her face flush; she seemed to take it to heart. He is a man of few pleasures, but, like many another husband, finds his principal enjoyment in making his wife appear at her worst, not her best. She was silent for a

moment, and then asked him, with her face slightly paled:

“Do you think women without pluck?”

“Oh!” he answered, laughingly, “they sometimes have a seeming pluck, born of ignorance and stupidity.”

Then she turned on him with a scorn that must have been latent for many a day, and said:

“I’ll do anything you dare to do,—more, I’ll do anything you dare me to do.”

Now it so happens that Aiken is divided in half by a gully some fifty feet wide and fifty deep, through which the railroad runs; it is an ugly cut with precipitous sides. We reached this place as her words were spoken. The wooden bridge that had spanned it the day before was now in the form of ashes on the track below. The night previous a drunken negro had stum-

bled with a lamp, and the bridge had ceased to be, all except one long wooden girder about four inches wide stretching its charred end out about half over the chasm. The moment B. caught sight of it he cried:

“Good! I dare you to walk out to the end of that and back.”

I swung around and faced him.

“You can’t mean it!” I hoarsely exclaimed, my voice raucous in fright, “forbid her to, for God’s sake.”

With an intensely amused look in his face he raised his forefinger to his lips warningly, and pointed with his other hand over my shoulder. I turned—she was well out over the edge, her arms outstretched and carrying herself with the grace and assured strength of a panther.

My hands and feet became ice, there seemed to be in me a cessation of all life.

The smile never left his face. He was pleased, she was affording him a new sensation. I knew that if I made any attempt to go to her aid it might cause her to lose her balance, but while her back was turned I tiptoed up noiselessly to the very edge where the girder went into the earth. I now know what eternity means. Slowly, but with no uncertain step, she reached the end, then, with a perceptible tremble, she changed the position of both feet until they rested transversely to the beam, the most difficult way to stand and retain one's balance. At last she faced us again and for one moment she raised her eyes and gazed into mine with oh, such a pathetic look, — a look as of one who was shaking hands with death and knew not whether her hand was to be released or not. There I stood with arms outstretched and a smile, the

sort of smile a man might wear for a little while in the torture-chamber. However, now that she had made the turn and was slowly returning, I felt a creeping sensation of hope, but when hope is greatest, suspense is hardest to bear. By leaning forward I could almost touch her hands. I did not dare put my weight on the girder, it seemed so rotten. Suddenly my heart sank. I heard the increasing rumble of an approaching train. I knew that any object coming toward her, going beneath, and passing away she would intuitively follow, though ever so slightly, with her eyes, which would mean death.

When she, too, heard and realised, she stopped, and a gray pallor overspread her face. Absolutely motionless she stood for one short moment, then with her presence of mind and her confidence gone, she gave

one quick glance at the train as it thundered beneath her, and whirling, fell — into my extended arms. Her weight brought me, with a crash to the ground, and there she dangled over the edge, dependent upon the failing strength of a pair of human arms. I caught her closer to me so I could encircle her waist with one arm, released my left and threw it over the girder, also resting my left shoulder along its edge. Then for the first time I seemed to recollect and hoarsely cried: "Aren't you going to help? For God's sake, man, be quick!" No answer. I thought my right arm would go by the roots. Just then I heard a cracking sound beneath my left shoulder, the girder was breaking off close to the edge. I saw its outer end slowly pointing downward. Again I called, "In the name of God, help us." Only silence. I could not turn my

head to see, but I knew now he had gone, for no man made in the image of God could have stood there and made no effort. Slowly Mrs. B's head turned for the first time, and face to face with one another and death, we looked our love into one another's eyes. The only words were spoken by me: —

“Have courage, you sha'n't go alone, I am coming too.”

With a final snapping the beam parted. I watched its fall till it crashed on the tracks below. Then I felt myself slipping farther and farther over the edge. Suddenly I was grasped by the ankles and with a mighty jerk I was pulled back. The next moment — B. was by my side; together we raised Mrs. B., who had fainted, and he placed her in a safe position behind me, giving me a hand; I rose, and there we

stood looking at one another. His eyes were dancing with delight and amusement.

"Ye gods!" he cried. "*I have had a sensation.* I never watched anything so interesting in my life. You know, I could not help smiling at you; you were indeed prostrating yourself before Death in a very humble way. To have gone into his presence on your belly, must surely have pleased his vanity."

Had he meant, even for a moment, to let us die? I wondered then and I wonder now. Had God and the Devil had a battle for the possession of this man and had God won? I wondered then and I wonder now.

That evening I dined alone at the club. I was in no mood to listen to twaddle nor to talk it. About nine I wandered down to B.'s cottage to inquire how my lady fared.

In the year's necklace of nights, this one

was its most perfect gem. The full moon, verily the eye of heaven, looked intermittently down upon the earth between waves of foamy clouds that beat upon the shore of nowhere. The air was like a cool bandage on a fevered brow, and the odour of the pines was as incense — to me, a worshipper. “There is but one temple in the universe and that is the body of man.” So you see at present I am my own place of worship. The future has no interest for me. We all of us in this world walk forward in “company front” with our noses pressed against the veil of the future — not one can withdraw his nose the millionth of a second, nor one advance his the millionth of an inch; only as time recedes can we step forward. I am too wise to wish the curtain raised, or rendered transparent, and too contented to make futile guesses.

Hitherto I have been a man without any special interest, and a man without an interest in life is like a picture without a background. In my case this is now remedied.

I found her seated on the porch — the moon was evidently as much in love with her as I, but pluckier, for it left no part of her untouched. She rose to greet me, and said:

“I am glad you have come, as I wish to tell you before you even ask, that I give myself to you, that I am completely and wholly yours, that that man whom I am still compelled to call my husband shall never be more to me than an ugly memory.”

I raised her hand to my lips and said, “This betokens submission,” then bending down I kissed her reverently on the forehead, “and this in behalf of all there is good in me — a benediction.” On her eyes next

I placed the kiss of peace, next to love, God's greatest gift. On either cheek one of friendship, and whispered, "Without friendship love is without endurance." Then on her lips a kiss, but I spoke not — the kiss spake for itself.

Good night, old man, the sun is peeping over the rim of the earth as I write, and I wish to sleep, that I may dream.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

THIRTEENTH LETTER

*Shady Side of Commonwealth Avenue,
Boston, Mass.*

DEAR DOUGLAS:—

Bob, Katharine, and Cynthia are just returned from Boston's Babylon, New York. "Coming out" seems to me a curious process. It appears to be a sort of formal introduction to idleness—gilded idleness. You meet everybody who isn't doing anything. It is a menace to health and an invitation to frivolise your soul—you champagne and terrapin yourself when you ought to be asleep, and sleep when you ought to be about your Father's business. You upset all the notions of your Puritan

ancestors, who claimed with Pericles that, “she is the best woman who is least heard of, either for good, or for evil.” You deify the unimportant, and trivialise the serious things of life. You take an innocent young girl whom you have protected from the tawny press, and from all knowledge of evil, in whose presence you have ever remembered, *Maxima debetur puellis reverentia*, whom you have taught the prayers of the ages and the piety of the Gospels, and you present her with the world’s decalogue as follows:—

“Thou shalt have one God only ; who
Would be at the expense of two ?
No graven images may be
Worshipped, except the currency :
Swear not at all ; for, for thy curse,
Thine enemy is none the worse :
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend :
Honour thy parents ; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall :

Thou shalt not kill ; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive :
Do not adultery commit ;
Advantage rarely comes of it :
Thou shalt not steal ; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat :
Bear not false witness ; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly :
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition."

It is an absurd world, is it not? But thank
Heaven there is one wise man left in it:
la sagesse c'est moi!

I am rejoiced to have them back. They
are all three full of their experiences. Cynthia
has sat in our social House of Lords,
surrounded by tiaraed celebrities, and finds
that they do not bite, that they do not eat
ambrosia and drink nectar all the time, and
that their life is not all one long lolling
upon the slopes of Olympus. That's good
for her imagination, at any rate. The un-
known is always a billion times too big.

And in the case of the young, to satisfy the demands of the imagination is often to draw the sting of evil.

As for old Bob, he has had a "bully time." He finds the young fellows of this generation bigger and better than his own contemporaries—there's optimism for you! He tells of a dinner of twenty he gave for Cynthia, where, out of the nine young men present, seven drank nothing, and five did not smoke. He is loud in his praises of the "flannelled fools at the wicket, and the muddied oafs at the goals." Bob's no fool on the subject of horses, and dogs, and young men, and no doubt he is right. He was greatly surprised to find that many of his own generation had grown old. He found a deplorable lack of hair, a curious prominence of abdomen, a shortness of breath, an overnicety about eating and

drinking, and a tendency to cantankerous criticism of one's neighbours. He was thoroughly taken aback by the growth of New York, by the evidences of prosperity, by the shoals of people who now live upon a scale of expenditure for houses, horses, and servants unknown, except to a limited number, even twenty years ago. He tells me that, in 1798, New York had less than forty thousand inhabitants. Now there are three millions and a half. Bob rubs his hands over this, as though it were in some sort his doing, as though he were in some way bigger, too. Nice fellow, Bob! A fine, quinine-like stimulant in a weary world. He hated to go to New York, and now, if you please, he thinks Cynthia ought to go again. She ought not to miss this, that, and the other function, he says. What a great thing it is to be at home in the

world! Drop Bob anywhere, and he has a "bully time." He converts me at times, and I wonder if Bob isn't made after the pattern in the Mount, after all, and the rest of us just fretful mistakes of the Almighty. He would not make a Napoleon, but he would have made a splendid Ney. And I am not sure that genius does not always do harm in the world, even when it is successful. Do you recall a really first-rate genius who was thoroughly good and thoroughly sane?

They have been trying to get a parson for my old parish, and have about made up their minds to ask a certain young man. When I told Bob about it, he listened with his usual cheerfulness, and then — what do you suppose? — asked if I thought he would make a good secretary for the golf club. That has kept me in good spirits for two

days. I suggested to Bob that the parish clerk write and inform him that he could not use the Haskell ball in our parish. He didn't seem to think that much of a joke. I believe it was Buckle, he of the "History of Civilisation," who claimed that men and women were divided into three classes mentally. The first and lowest class talk of *persons*; the second talk about *things*; the third and highest about *ideas*. Now Bob is devoted to the discussion of *persons* and *things*, but, by any standards of life that I thread the maze by, I cannot rate him as inferior. He is trustworthy, brave, and truthful, but so far as my rather intimate brother-in-lawerly acquaintance with him goes, he has never discussed an idea in his life. Just between you and me, Buckle be blowed! It is the zest for life that counts. Yesterday did not suffice; to-day is not

enough. Bob is forever trying to steal to-morrow from God. What handsomer compliment could he pay his Creator!

How easy it is to take up the defence of those we love! The farther I drift away from even the possibility of doing things, the more I become a mere browser, the more, I suppose, I like the hewers of wood, the drawers of water, and those who go down to the sea in ships. The clank of a spur, the creak of a sail, the ring of a sword, fascinates me. Having successfully disconnected my head from my legs, I am tempted to doubt whether the psalmist was altogether right in warning us against "the legs of a horse."

I was scribbling along in this empty fashion when your two letters arrived, forwarded from West Braintree. At what an awful rate you are living, my dear Douglas,

my poor Douglas. How overwhelming must be your present predicament — or, may I call it, your present infatuation — that permits you, that prompts you, to write to me of it all. I sometimes feel that I must be dreaming, or that you must be writing a story for my amusement. I seem to have lost my moral equilibrium in cherishing you still among my friends. And yet I cannot thrust you, and even these present interests of yours, away from me. What a tragedy the accident must have been! What a beast is this man, the husband of your friend! I have never known such a man. Is it not possible that you darken the picture? It is hard for me to imagine such sensuous cruelty. Are you sure you are right in describing a man, a live man, as actually tempting his own wife into serious physical danger? Throttling were too

good for him! Ah, how complicated life is, after all! To be good seems the plainest of propositions, and yet here am I puzzling over my own near friend. My gorge rises at the scene you must have witnessed, and yet—yes, by God, sir, I believe I should have kissed her myself! But this is no solution of the problem, either for you or for me. That miserable weakness of mine for the man who does things is, I fear, playing me false. It is clear enough to me, theoretically, that you have no right to that woman, that she has no right to you. Is there no way out, even now, for one or the other of you, or for both? Could it not all be as though it had never been? I would to God that I were wise enough, strong enough, to lead you both back to where you were before. How little I dreamed, in

writing my first letter to you, that I should be introduced into life again, and such hot life, — life that is so far removed from this quiet room, from this peaceful monotony of the cripple, who, sheltered himself, mute and powerless himself, has suddenly revealed to him, as on a distant stage, a tragedy, in which those he loves play the chief parts. At least this much I know: I may not run away. It can do no harm to tell me, though I be too weak to be strong for you — and for her. I am very tired to-night. Perhaps these last two letters have played upon my nerves, as they would not upon those of a stronger man. I am reading myself to sleep. May I read you the poem?

“ Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

“ In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

“ Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

“ It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate :
I am the captain of my soul.”

Good night, my dear Douglas! May I
see clearer to-morrow!

PERCY DASHIEL.

FOURTEENTH LETTER

Aiken, South Carolina.

DEAR PERCY: —

I am constrained to speak to you about one subject before I begin my letter about myself (for my letters are always that).

You must think it strange that I never mention your condition, your suffering, and your patience. I have decided to do so, once for all, because I think between men too much is taken for granted, and too little said. The supposition that a man can get along just as well without sympathy is an erroneous one. Silent sympathy (always without pity) is a great help to a man sore at heart. By silent sympathy, I mean a hand on the shoulder, which wires: "I

know, feel, and understand." No man could do better; you are facing your "fearful odds" as a man should, and how could one do better? — not die better, for I know, as few can, that this pitiful earth cannot spare you until your three score and ten have passed. Of later years, in this country, it is fashionable to be "casual" in your manners, morals, and friendships. I believe it is wiser to put yourself on record once, as I do now, as having the keenest admiration for your pluck, your adaptability, your faith, and your capacity to encourage yourself. I had a friend once, an "emotional" of the Latin race, who, for the lack at the critical moment of a hand on his shoulder and a whisper, "I know and care," committed suicide. I now place mine on yours. God bless you — He has, for He has given you a grip on something more important

than life — a grip on yourself. I had another friend who was saved by an unconsciously given lesson. He was at his wits' end, his troubles seemed cumulative, and no one cared. So he went one night to the dingiest hotel in that whirlpool city of New York, with a big revolver in his pocket, intending to make his sleep a lasting one. He thought it unjust to himself to take his life except at a time when his brain was clear; there was no emotional insanity about him; he simply thought that penury, loneliness, and an incurable complaint were justification enough. So he slept for an hour or two, then he awakened about five of a winter's morning; but outside of his cheerless room, in the dark, criminally cold entry, he heard a voice singing — a voice rich with an inimitable brogue — "The Rocky Road to Dublin," sung in a voice

clear and true, with the most marvellous co-relation to her work, for her work consisted of washing, with soap, water, and a scrubbing-brush, a most ungrateful hall. As she banged her brush into the corners to efface some encrusted dirt, her voice rose high and the time grew faster, then, as it returned to the open, she once more dropped into a rhythmic swing; the sweep of her brush on the floor was her baton. My friend lay quiet for awhile, and thought of what this woman had to live for, and yet was happy, and of what still remained to him in life. It resulted in his slinking out of the house with shame in his heart, but later in the day he found himself whistling "The Rocky Road to Dublin," and making light of his daily task.

As for you, dear old chap, you are one of God's right-hand men, for you have for-

gotten creeds, and know nothing but the Golden Rule. A God who needs to be worshipped in a set, formal way is a creation of a finite mind.

“So many gods, so many creeds,
Too many paths that wind and wind,
While the art of being always kind
Is all this sad world needs.”

And now for my affairs.

I had an accidental interview with B. to-day I think it might amuse you to describe. I was seated in the bay-window of the Aiken Club, one of the cosiest, most intelligently planned clubs I was ever in. The smoke of my cigarette was doing marvellous scrollwork in a sunbeam. A mocking-bird was making love in the most shameless way outside, and thanking God for the opportunity in a roulade of musical notes. A cluster of men were on the

piazza, calling their "niggers" to bring their buggies. Rastus, Mengo, Rabbit, and Smart were the names I heard. I had ordered a "Pink Daisy," a favourite drink down here. By the bye, don't worry about my drinking — the climate here supplies you with all the ginger and champagne you need. My "wee nippie" had come, and I was fain to be as thankful as the mocking-bird, when, looking up, I saw the handsome if sinister face of B. He dropped into a chair by my side, and "opened the ball" by saying, in the most inconsequential way:

"Got any illusions left, Dayton?"

Not knowing what he intended should follow, for a moment I was at a loss for an answer.

"A few," I replied.

"Believe in the Bible and women and

chastity and the special interposition of Providence, I suppose; must have those important ones left, I imagine."

I told him I believed in the Bible partly, in woman altogether, in chastity as worthy of practice, and in the special interposition of Providence not at all.

Purposely misunderstanding me, he said:

"Yes, I believe in women altogether in so far as their intelligence is concerned — collectively they know what they want, and individually they get it. The direct cut they take to gain their ends, disregarding what is hurt by the way, excites my admiration. They are human ploughs that cast on either side whatever interferes, who make furrows in which they plant poisonous seeds."

"How often were you jilted?" I asked him. "That's generally the way a fellow

talks when a good woman has discovered he's a bad man."

"Twice," he answered, unabashed — "once by a woman who was too good to be true, and once by a woman who was too true to be believed — a communicant and a coryphée."

"Don't you find alliteration an ingrowing habit?" I asked. "It is apt to make you say what you really don't mean."

Here he sweepingly insulted all women, as one might wantonly throw mud at a marble statue.

You *must* know, Percy, no matter what you think of my conduct now, that my respect and admiration for women has been a part of me so long as to be a habit of mind. I have met many bad women, who were in most ways better than good men. I thought perhaps he knew this feeling of

mine, and was trying to work up a quarrel that would lead to fight. Frankly I was ready and willing, and I longed, as I never had to kiss a woman, to plant one convincing blow on that inviting mouth. Love does not thrive on opposition, but hate does; love, like water, cannot run up-hill, but hate can, and my hate of him was running up over the barriers of my better judgment, like the tide in the Bay of Fundy, but I realised that any struggle between us would only injure the one I sought to protect. But no, he was still smiling that smile which the Devil carved on his face.

By simply twisting his words, I turned his insult into a compliment.

He looked at me a moment, then, yawning, arose and said: "Well turned, my boy," then added: "Dayton, there have been more men ruined by women than

women by men. There are only two things that prevent a man being immoderately happy in this world : one is lack of money, the other women ; to possess the first is content, to possess the latter is hell. I advise you to go slowly, to go damned slowly.”

Then he strolled away. What do you think of him? I shall ignore his existence.

Perhaps you think I understand women, and perhaps I do, but I doubt it. I think God does, but He is the only one. A willing man must be a chameleon to adapt himself to a woman's moods. Then again, sometimes it is the woman who is the chameleon, and adapts her colour to her surroundings, and less frequently the woman, who is beauty allied to force, compels her surroundings to adapt themselves to her. To try to please one woman is no worse than trying to please everybody, like the

man with the ass in Æsop's fable. At least thirty distinct people reside in the skin of one woman. I say thirty advisedly, because I have calculated. The female population of this earth should be multiplied by thirty if you really wish to know how many people there are in the world. A man's moods change from the outside in; something happens to depress him, and he is depressed, something happens to elate, and he is elated; but the woman changes from the inside out, without any indebtedness to outside cause. The man is a thermometer regulated by the climate of his affairs, the woman is a thermometer regulated by the condition of her insides. Don't think this flippant, because it is true. I could give you an intermediate reason that would sound prettier, but, if you care to go to "first causes," you will see that I am

right, and any reasoning woman will tell you so.

I had a walk with Mrs. B. this morning. We walked all the way to Robinson's Pond, which, being quite a tramp, indicated a desire on her part to be with me. During the whole time she was monosyllabic, and yet kept on walking.

Didn't she care for me any more?

Yes.

Had I done anything to offend her?

No.

What was the matter?

Nothing.

Show me the man who has not had a similar talk with the woman he loves, and I'll show you a man who lies. I tried to make myself acceptable in forty different ways; I kept silent in seven languages. I sat on my hind legs and begged, played

dead, offered to shake hands, but it was of no use. At last, being for the moment honestly bored, I yawned. Hereafter, Percy, when in doubt, yawn. A yawn, which is a relaxation to you, is a wonderful tonic to a woman. It affects her pride, and her pride is the only thing that affects her insides. I never had a chance to yawn for the rest of that day. I never had an opportunity to open my mouth again. She was brilliant. One woman could give variety to eternity. With her, I am playing one moment on the blue limpid ice of intellectuality, and the next am romping amidst the heavy sensuous verdure of the tropics. At last I am the beginning and the end of all things to myself — at last, I am I, and she is God's masterpiece in womanhood, that beckons to all sides of my nature at once. I love her in a thousand different

ways, for she is a thousand different women to me. When I am with her, I am luminous; when she leaves me, I am the likeness of a starless night.

Wednesday.

As you perceive, several days have elapsed since the last sentence was written. The reason is I sprained my thumb, and when I tried to hold a pencil, it fluttered like an aspen leaf. I sprained my thumb by an overexertion of the muscles in an honest effort to choke a man to death. It is quite a new sensation for me to realise that a moment more and I would be a murderer. Somehow the thought does not fit into the rest of my life. However, hereafter, whenever I am dull and bored, I can picture the close, ill-smelling courtroom, the judge who, as he mechanically listens, is thinking of his lunch, the prose-

cutor who, though he might think me innocent, would still plead for my death, the cheap oratory of my hired defender, and the fatuous faces of the "twelve good men and true," through whose brains an idea would sink about as fast as a leaden pellet would through dough — and then the hanging. I know just how I should look, as I have a photograph taken here of a negro who had been lynched, hanged to the first tree. In life he had been a small man, but, after being hanged by the neck, he became surprisingly long and attenuated. My six feet two, similarly elongated, would have the appearance of three yards of black tape. You see now I have something to amuse me on a rainy day.

This is the way it happened; if you care to hear. You see I doubt your sympathy; I seem to be receding from you so fast as

to leave you a mere speck back through the vista of years. I wonder is there any of the Christ in your religion. Most men's religion only teaches them how not to forgive. "Evil communications corrupt good manners;" be careful as you read, O "man of God."

The men had all gone shooting, including B. Mrs. B. and I had gone for one of our walks through the soldierly pines — they, so loyal, that even after death their skeletons stand upright and at attention before their Lord. At last, tired but happy, we sat down on a log by the side of a dried river-bed filled with sand. I begged her to leave her husband — to come with me.

She looked at me for a moment rather quizzically, and said:

"Is not that proposition somewhat *im*-modern? People don't do that sort of thing

nowadays. In olden times it was possible to hide, but now no one can be lost to the world until under ten feet of earth, or at the bottom of the fathomless sea. Under those circumstances, to be happy one must be lost among strangers; our friends would never permit us to forget the immorality of our relations. The little delusion that it would have been sinful to have done otherwise, a delusion that all people so situated bind to their souls 'with hooks of steel,' is seldom shared by their friends." Then she turned and, looking me squarely in the eyes, asked:

"Why do you never speak of your wife? Why do you never mention her name? — answer me that first. A man who can so completely forget one woman, can more easily forget two. Forgetfulness improves with practice, like anything else."

I told her that north, south, east, or west, whichever way I looked, I saw nothing but her, that an opaque curtain had fallen between me and my past. This is all I said, for you cannot bemoan one person by belittling another.

For a moment she seemed lost in thought, then she asked:

“Where and how can we go?”

I answered: “We can take the train from here to Augusta, catching the ‘Palm Limited,’ and —”

“Ah, but those trains don’t connect,” said a voice behind us. “You’ll have to go to Blackville to meet the ‘Florida Flyer.’” I knew the voice, and so did she. Slowly our heads turned automatically in his direction; there sat B., with his inevitable smile, his gun resting between his legs.

He added: "You know, Dayton, there is a time-table at the club."

As for my sensations, you can guess at them better than I can describe them. He rose first, and moved out into the throat of the river, which was as parched as mine. I gave one glance at her; she was like a flower that had grown old in a night. We two walked up to him until he turned and faced us, as children might to learn their fate. He looked at us a moment, and then said, in a voice the music of which I noticed for the first time:

"My dear sir, I never blame a man for a condition of this sort; man at his best is a predatory beast—I blame the woman." Then turning to her, he added: "My dear, I think a little old-fashioned corporal punishment will do you good. You—"

As the last word came to his mouth, it

was as if you had pricked a balloon of blood. His face, which had been white, became scarlet, and, raising his clenched fist, repeating, "You —" But that word was never formulated. I was too quick; an old-fashioned "lock" that I remember brought him to the ground, with me on top. I am honest in saying that for a moment my heart refused its functions; with my fist raised in the air, I tried to strike, but my fist would not fall. I was like a graven image; life had been arrested. Then my heart, wishing to make up for lost time, raced like a propeller out of water, and my hand descended on his throat as unyielding as the grip of death. I choked and choked until his eyes lay like partially ripened grapes upon his cheeks. Lord bless your heart, it was funny to see him wiggle; he had the strength of one man,

and I of ten devils. As he weakened, I changed my right hand on his neck to the left, and, taking a handful of the powdered sand on which we lay, sifted it gently down his purple throat. I meant there should be silence there for some time; it would be yet a little while before he could call her *that* name. Then I looked up at her, who was watching God's duty taken from His hands, and smiled. There she stood, with her hands interlaced in front of her and a look of apathetic indifference on her face. With a low questioning voice, she asked:

“It is enough, is it not?”

The lust of murder flew from me at the sound of her steady voice, and I answered, “Yes,” and, gazing at the death-mask he had for a face, I felt perhaps *too* much.

That's all. We took him home between us. It wasn't a pleasant drive. It is wear-

some waiting for God to take vengeance, but when we attempt to do His work, it creeps over us He might have done it better. We met no one on the way back, and I carried him to his room and placed him on his bed almost tenderly. Nothing to me seemed to matter much. Perhaps I had killed, and perhaps not. "Perhaps" seemed almost as big a word as "if," but both seemed unimportant.

A servant telephoned for the doctor, and I left. She and I shook hands like two bored people at a ball, saying, "Good night."

I can't write you much more, for my thumb pains me.

Sunday afternoon.

I have not the slightest doubt of the existence of hell, as I have it within me. I have been waiting in suspense, which is my idea of hell, for four days — would

he live? would he die? Iteration and reiteration produce insanity. I have not been to the house where he lies to inquire. I walk past there hourly, and look at the door-bell. The Scotch whiskey here is *very* good, but not strong enough. I could drink a gallon and not feel it. It is curious how one vice entails another. I never knew how necessary sleep is. I have never been without it before; not sleeping, I find, makes one quite nervous.

I heard a man telling another in the club to-day of an accident that had happened to B.—he had tripped and fallen and wrenched his neck. Suddenly the man turned to me and said:

“For God’s sake, Dayton, stop staring idiotically at your hands. They’re quite clean.”

I must break myself of this foolish habit.

Monday.

I had hardly finished dressing this morning when a note was brought to me. I saw it was from his cottage, then I knew he was dead. I did not *think* anything about it. I *knew* he was dead. I threw the letter to one side — why open it? I peered in the glass: I wanted to get a good look at a murderer. It so happens I have never seen one. A murderer develops a strong likeness to the man he has killed. I seemed the image of B. At last I opened the note, and this is what I read: —

“DEAR DAYTON: —

“I cannot as yet talk, as you of all men can best imagine (sand in the throat is out of place), but I can write. Do not wait in Aiken longer than you wish, for any duel or other such nonsense. There will be

none. If I thought my wife actually guilty, I should make of her a present to you. I could never see the sense of a man's risking his life for an unworthy cause. As for what you did to me, I feel no resentment. A man has a right to do anything to a woman but strike her. I was a bit hasty. Don't be dull, and take me for a coward — I assure you fear was left out in my make-up. As I believe my wife to be guilty only in intention, I propose to retain her services, as we say in the law, and punish her in my own sweet way.

“ Yours,

“ B.”

A characteristic letter, don't you think so, Percy?

I leave here to-morrow for Washington.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

FIFTEENTH LETTER

Boston, Mass.

YOU have had the sensation, my dear Douglas, of wishing to awake and throw off the amorphous incubus of a bad dream. I read your letter, and still feel as though it were a dream or a tale, — something I shall awake from and find unreal. All this, the moral side as well as the physical side, is so far away from me. It is like sitting in the gentle sunshine of a spring day, and seeing a hurricane uprooting, tearing, and smashing among the homes of your neighbours.

I am somewhat shaky, morally, to find myself, in a sense, the confessor, shut up in a box in the cathedral of my infirmities,

listening to cruelties and passions of which I know so little, and over which I have so little control. I was a man once myself, to be sure, but I was professionally sheltered from the storm and stress of such experiences as these. I try to think what I would do in a like predicament, or what I would have another do for me were I you, and I only know that I would wish to be trusted still, and to be cared for the more, the more I found my feet in miry places. Let me do that for you! Perhaps if I were stronger physically, I should be harsher spiritually than I now find I can be. The pride of bone and blood and muscle is no longer mine. Perhaps I have a sympathy for weakness, born of weakness. What a poor creature is man even in his best state that he should in a moment be dashed from physical prowess to invalidism by a horse,

like me; or picked up and whirled into a vortex of adventures, over which he has little control, by a woman, like you!

We walk about like "forked radishes," as Swift says, knowing one another largely by the clothes we wear, until of a sudden this one or that one is galvanised into a display of passion, or knavery, as the case may be, and lo, we are surprised! We know not what to do, what to prescribe, what attitude to take. We call this good, the other bad, and stumble about in our hobnailed boots amongst broken hearts and damaged reputations and homes in pieces and shattered hopes, like so many clodhoppers in a picture gallery. We gape, stare, and do not understand. There is a Fortuny, there a Rousseau, there a Diaz, and here again a Vibert; but, so far as Hans and the other yokels are concerned, they might as well

never have been painted. I feel that way now, hence I have a deal of sympathy for those who look upon the men about them as so many suits of clothes. There they hang on the line. A workingman's blouse, an admiral's uniform, an Anglo-dandiacal frock coat, innumerable "business suits," so called, of dull browns and grays, here and there a dash of colour, a line of red or check of purple or yellow. There they hang and swing, according as the wind blows soft or hard. Of a sudden the frock coat bulges out, capers about, swings its arms, takes possession of some female baggage with another's tag upon it, and is off the line in a jiffy.

There is a boom of cannon, a yelling, rattling, tramping, and the admiral's uniform fills out, becomes imposing, waves commands with dignity and purpose, and

off the line it slips, and we have a hero that we scarcely know what to do with. We weep and laugh and dance over this uniform, and then in no time there it is on the line again, bedraggled, soiled, shopworn, as empty as ever.

A "business suit" spruces up, the pockets bulge with notes and gold; there is a chink and a tinkle as it moves, and lo, that plain brown suit with the red lines is a millionaire!

The workingman's blouse grows tremulous as to the sleeves, the bosom part heaves and falls, there is unwonted and excited motion, and bless my soul, here is a socialist upon us without warning, fencing with conservative journals, trying a fall with Mallock, or any other champion of the old order.

Now what is a plain simpleton like me

to do, to think! I know all those suits of clothes well enough. I know the creases, the wrinkles, the patches, the shiny parts, — all about them in fact, — or so I flatter myself. I have my philosophy of life, into which these suits of clothes fit; I can deal with them; I can guess what they will do. When the wind is from the east, they will swing toward the west; when the wind is from the north, they will swing toward the south. The whole clothes-line of them is simple enough, and I am accustomed to their ways and mannerisms. But what becomes of my opinions, of my prejudices, my principles, even, when these tame suits of clothes become possessed of devils or angels, as the case may be, begin to act according to laws of which I know nothing, propelled by impulses and passions not to

be found in any book on social haberdashery.

You must not think me flippant, my dear Douglas, in writing thus to you. I am writing to myself really. I am puzzled, and trying to write my thoughts upon a black-board, so that I may see how they look a few paces off. Here we are, an old and dear friend of mine suddenly assuming a principal and dangerous—and to me equivocal — part in a drama. It is all very well for other spectators to applaud or hiss or remain silent; with me it is different. When your own boy is brought home with a bullet through his lungs, war becomes a very different matter from the lazy reading of the head-lines of a morning paper.

I am no great hand at devouring the newspaper-told tales of scandal and domestic trouble. It all seems far away from me,

and interests me almost not at all. Now, without warning, I am personally involved, — sympathetically, at any rate, — in what seems to me to be a very dreadful affair. I could not stand by and see a woman pummelled in the face, even though the aggressor were her husband, and I perhaps the cause of the trouble. Yet I fear I do you harm in seconding you in any of the details of the affair. That it is all wrong, I have not a shadow of doubt. That is easy enough to settle with my conscience. I hope some day to settle it so with yours ; but when I come to go into details, I find it hard to lay down hard and fast rules. I am like a surgeon who lacks confidence when he comes to deal with his own child, and must needs turn the case over to some one else. If I did not know you, if I did not care for you, if I had not invited these very confidences

that now overwhelm me, I should cut and cauterise and sew up without a tremble of the hand. To be quite frank with you, I do not wish to lose you, you or your friendship. We do not make many new friends after forty. We get stiff and self-engrossed and much employed with our own business, and somewhat suspicious, too, perhaps. I would rather remain your physician than pack you off to those who care very little whether you are well or ill, and nothing at all whether you are happy or unhappy, wise or foolish. I believe that the very best thing that one man can do for another in this world is to believe in him. I propose to believe in you, my dear boy, till you go mad or die. There are better things in you than those things that occupy you now. You will scoff now, but there are nobler things to love than what you now love.

Mercy and sympathy and chivalry have somehow combined to cheat you. It is always so, I suppose, in life. A man finds himself tempted by the very virtues he worships. Life is not the simple thing, then, of clothes on a line. You are in that evil case now. You are asked to be merciful, but to the wrong person. You are asked to be courageous, but in the wrong quarrel. Your sympathies are excited, but toward the wrong object. You are drawn into loving what you ought not to love. The Devil isn't dead yet. I see that clearly enough. He has been more than a match for you, and he puzzles me greatly.

You write that you are on your way to Washington. Can you not interest yourself in the life there? Write me about it. It will interest me greatly. Or why not come North altogether? I will go back to West

Braintree and open the house, and we will have a week or two there. Dull enough prospect for you, perhaps, but it would be giving me great pleasure. At all events, keep me posted about your movements. Remember that I would help if I could, and above all remember that I am impartially and loyally your well-wisher, and always

Affectionately yours,

PERCY DASHIEL.

SIXTEENTH LETTER

Washington.

DEAR PERCY:—

Your kind letter received. I hope sincerely you will stick to me and believe in me, “come what come may, even if I go mad;” if you don’t, I promise to become an atheist. You cannot seem to understand I am not the least ashamed of myself, but *per contra* am as proud as a peacock—head held high, chest thrown out, and defiance in my eye. Whether I shall go back to dear old Aiken, or remain here a little longer, I have not decided. You see, as I wrote to you, I mean to ignore his existence, that is, as much as it is possible to ignore where you hate. In the meanwhile I am

happy. My conscience cannot be very clouded, as I do not remember when I have enjoyed the swift, sweet hours of sleep so much as now. Did you ever realise that sleep is the brain's recess; then it plays as it likes; it is no longer the slave of the will, hence the amusing inconsequence of dreams.

No one can be sinful and happy, so please cease thinking of me as a "monster of hideous mien;" besides, if heaven is only peopled by "those without sin," it will be crowded with babies, and I never was fond of the nursery as a living-room.

Because you never mention my wife, I know you are thinking a great deal about her, but do not worry. A real grievance would be a godsend to her. I don't wish to be disloyal, but I can speak of her to you when I could not to Mrs. B. She belongs, as you know, to that class of people

one would like to make happy — at a great distance. It seems to me that the life of a peace-loving husband is one of a human intaglio, made so by the aggressive angularity of an assertive wife. Divorces begin when he tires of being an intaglio and tries to become a cameo; besides, it is difficult to keep fond of those who always manage to associate themselves in our minds with trouble. With most men and women, the quickest way to grow apart is to live together. Do not think ill of me for speaking in this way, remember I am writing to my father confessor. In this matter I may be all wrong, and I may not; I never know. Your life has tended to make you positive in regard to all things, mine to make me uncertain about everything. You would not distrust your judgment any more than your God. I might distrust both. My

present predicament may be God's own doing — how do you know to the contrary? It seems to me sometimes as if the Creator were not omnipotent, but was playing a game of chess with the Devil — the world the board, mortals as pawns. This might account for the incomprehensible moves, involving cruelty, misery, and unnecessary death, that are made by fate; they may be God's moves of expediency to save the game in the end.

All that grieves me at present is the fact that I grieve you, but stay by me, Percy, old man; sometimes evil is done that good may come. Wait with me till the end. You ask me to interest myself in Washington. I have. It is unique in this country; it will be the best residential city of the world sometime. In my opinion, it is the best governed city in the States, and that

is because the residents have nothing to do with the government. In Washington the rich have some rights the poor are bound to respect, in New York none. There is, as you know, a plan to beautify the city on a grand scale, which I understand would go through if the people of South Dakota and the people of North Dakota would only give their consent as States, but you can readily understand how bitterly they feel when their representatives and Senators have only been able to secure a paltry appropriation of \$5,000,000 for a post-office in a town of theirs of eight hundred inhabitants. Washington is called a city of magnificent distances; it is also one of unlimited expectionation. It is the most spittyful city in the world. Pardon me. I think the negro population is accountable for this.

In this country there is but one slave left, and he is the President of the United States; also he is the only man who cannot call his home his own. President Roosevelt strikes me as a man who is all he tries to be, and when a man's ambition is to be the best exponent of what an American should be, that is saying a great deal.

Washington contains the customs of a village with the vices of a metropolis. The municipal authorities have the faith of things unseen; when at night this place is wrapped in clouds, but the moon is shining above the clouds, you walk in darkness, for there are no electric lights. The moon is shining somewhere, so have faith, for it must replace light. The man who made this rule must be like A. Ward's kangaroo, an "amoozing little cuss."

I lunched at the Congressional Library

yesterday, and my only comment is that I think that the inside will be less striking but more pleasing a thousand years hence. The colours in St. Mark's of Venice have had time to cool off, but those in the Library suggest fresh paints on a palette, or the inflamed colouring of a diphtheritic sore throat.

Ah, but the men I met at luncheon! — the head librarian and his assistants — gentlemen one and all; living in and absorbing an atmosphere of literature and art. What a sensitising effect the study of these two things has upon the mind! The most noticeable characteristic of these men was gentleness. Did you ever meet a gentle politician? I never did.

As for the social life here, it differs very little from other American cities, except where the Diplomatic Corps have intro-

duced monarchical conventionalities. The question of precedence is a burning one, and a Congressman's wife, who would have followed her cook into the kitchen to prepare the evening meal, insists upon rising and leaving a dinner party preceding another Congresswoman who has resided one year less in Washington than she. The question agitating society just now is, Can a woman be at any time a man? Can petticoats ever replace pants? That is, can the wife of an ambassador, at a Presidential function, take the place of her husband, if he happens to be ill? In most cities social life for the residents means no change for a generation in the people they meet, but in Washington it is a series of magic lantern slides in awesome rapidity; over the social door of Washington society should

be written, "Here to-day and gone to-morrow."

It is a marvellous place for visiting-cards. There is a snow-storm of them all the time. The men call upon each other with the frequency of idle girls. Somebody calls on you; you get out of bed at four in the morning and return his call. You must drop a card within the etiquettical time. He jumps into an automobile, tells the driver to go like a wave of light, and gets his return card back to you while you are in your bath. Such a toing and froing you can't imagine. I have had to order from Tiffany a Western blizzard of cards to last me out.

The girls here are the same as in any other part of this country. They say you can't paint a lily and improve it, so you can't describe an American girl and do her

justice. The other day I lunched with an American girl, brought up by a perfect type of American mother, and also with a foreign girl beauty. I assure you it worried me, trying to forget all the American girl didn't know and I did, and trying to remember all the foreign girl knew that I had tried to forget. The women here are not so clever as the men. In New York it is just the reverse. I took into dinner the other night the beautiful wife of a diplomat. She informed me about the moment soup was served that she had a "lofely baby and a lofely husband." As I knew nothing about sterilised milk and less about diplomacy, conversation flagged. On my left I had a lady you felt sure had been younger and prettier, though now she was neither old nor ugly, but she was fat. She regaled me with all the little errors of the

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other women present. Have you never noticed that as women grow older, fat and circumspection come about the same time. A woman, who was frail in more senses than one when she was slight, with the accession of fat has an accession of virtue. There is always something ridiculous about fat. After dinner a man talked to me who had a mind of memorised trifles, and lo! in a little while I felt that my acquaintance with idiocy had become intimacy. On this occasion they had coloured servants. If you ever have them, get them pink or blue. The butler we had was a lump of inefficient black pomposity.

To be honest, I do not care for gatherings of any sort. People collectively are cattle, as is proved by panics; individually they are often intelligent.

Every once in awhile a gray-haired states-

man passes out of sight in a cloud of scandal involving one of the opposite sex. Given a man of intellect and a woman of none, given a man of morals and a woman of none, a man of money and a woman of none, a woman of beauty and a man of none, a woman who can recall to an aged man the lost passions of his youth, and you have the ladder by which a statesman descends into an abyss of obloquy. Of course, there is no fool like an old fool, but remember a bad woman is the Devil's *chef d'oeuvre*.

Monday.

There is no use arguing with myself or you. I cannot keep away from her. I have decided to return to Aiken. Any decision is better than no decision at all, for it puts the mind at rest. All my life I have suffered and been without pleasure, and to

suffer is the best means to acquire an appetite for enjoyment. To go without food brings an appetite; to go without pleasure brings appreciation. Suppose you had lived all your life in a darkened room, where the pupils of your eyes had become abnormally developed, so you could just distinguish the outline of things sufficiently not to stumble; then imagine the room flooded with light for the first time, so you could see colour and detail — what a Bacchanalian revel of the sense of sight! what a drunken orgy of delight, to realise as a revelation the full beauty of things hitherto unseen! She has been all this to me, and more. Nowadays it is always sunlight in my brain; the curtains of my mind are never drawn. Of course you do not understand — how can you? There is, I know, a lost language to properly express

the way I feel, and I must needs learn it before I can make you realise that a miracle has been performed — that I have been “born again.”

Washington, Thursday.

I think I mentioned to you before that I find Fate a humourist of a very high grade. You can judge better if I am right, by reading what follows.

I was strolling toward the club Tuesday morning when who should I see striding toward me but B. This time his smile had broadened to a grin, as he came toward me with outstretched hand.

“By Jove, you here!” he exclaimed; “how delightful!” and his grin became audible. Rattling on, he continued: “Thought we would break the journey North by stopping off here; only arrived this morning; are staying at the Berring-

ton." It may amuse you to know that so am I. When I told him he laughed approvingly, and said:

"Well, thank Heaven there is no sand hereabouts. Hope you have better rooms than we have. Ours are on the top floor. By the bye, have just hired an automobile; come and take a drive with me this afternoon out into the country." I suppose my expression changed, for, gazing at me with a sneer, he added: "Don't look at me like that; one would think you were afraid. Do you fear me or the automobile?"

The simple truth was the weather was the coldest of the year. Washington occasionally has a day that would do credit to the Arctic regions, and I hated to be in his society. The very sight of the man made me draw into my shell like a turtle in the presence of an enemy. When he

suggested my being actuated by fear, there was nothing for me to do but accept. We arranged to start at three, and parted. I felt as I used to as a child, after making an appointment with a dentist. At three, in fur overcoats, we started down through Georgetown and out over the bridge, Arlington way. We were silent for some time. Then he remarked:

“ I suppose you find me difficult to understand; I find myself so. Don't try; give it up, as I have, and save your brain. My trouble at present is that I have a sneaking admiration for you.”

We were just passing a negro cabin of the most dilapidated appearance, when the door flew open, and out plunged a little rascal about five years old, as black as crape. He tried to cross in front of us, but was too late; we struck him, but fortu-

nately did not run over him. We must have knocked him fifteen feet. B. stopped the auto so suddenly as to almost throw me out. He had the little chap in his arms in a moment, looking into his face with a most distressed expression, and repeating over and over again, "Ma pore little pick-aninny," unconsciously talking "nigger talk," but the little bundle of rags lay very still; at last he turned to me, his face all white and showing tenderness in every line, and said, in a low voice: "Dayton, I believe I've killed him." Can you believe it? that brute was looking at me unashamed, with a big, big tear in either eye. Can it be, I thought, that this man's one weakness is children?—he has none of his own. The little one, thank God, was not killed, only stunned, and when he opened his eyes, he put out his two little dirty black hands

and placed them, with that confidence that only children have, on B.'s cheeks. B.'s sardonic smile had changed to a look a mother might have envied. We carried him into the cabin, for the bitter wind was sweeping the earth like a merciless broom. We found the inside as cold as the out, and the wind blew playfully through the crevices, unconscious or uncaring that its breath was death. Before a fire that had been and was not, sat two black men on the floor, their elbows on their knees, holding their frozen arms up before a paling ember, each arm as stiff as that of an Indian devotee who had kept his arm upraised for years. They barely noticed us as we entered; they were mentally frozen as well; theirs was an Arctic apathy. I glanced around the room, not a chair nor a table; everything had been burned, and they were

awaiting death with calm indifference. Suddenly I heard B. exclaim:

“Good God, man, look there!” and he pointed. Turning, I looked back and saw two women in one bed, with their arms tightly clasped about each other, gazing at us with wide-open eyes. They had over them only one dirty sheet and three or four old burlap bags. At last the younger one spoke, and said:

“Martha and I’s e in yer to keep wome, suh. Ole Abe ober dar say we all be dead by mo’ning, but I doan care; de Lawd’s always been good to me.” Then the older spoke, saying:

“Lucretia, doan you bodder de gemmen; dey can’t do us no good; you goin’ to have de Lawd’s arms roun’ you instead of mine mighty soon.”

“Have you nothing to eat in the house?”

I asked.

“No, suh; we done give all de bread dey was to little 'Rastus; we had him in de bed 'tween us 'fore you came, but he done hear a bell ringing outside, and he make a bolt for de do'.”

I turned and looked at B. There he stood, still holding little shivering 'Rastus close to his broad chest, while the wee one pulled his hair with impunity. The light of action came into B.'s face; he placed the child between the two women and opened the cabin door. The wind entered with a shriek of delight. To me the wind never seems to be chasing anything as it tears along, but to be fleeing in terror, with piteous screams of fear, seeking shelter from the wrath of gods. Then he called to me and said: “Will you look at that

Virginia rail fence on the opposite side of the road, and these people freezing to death!"

Here old Abe interrupted for the first time, saying: "Better not tech dat wood. Massa Remsen say he gwine to shoot de fust nigger dat done tech a stick of dat wood." B. threw him a look of contempt and beckoned to me. We crossed the road, and taking three of the largest rails, brought them to the cabin door. B. poked his head in and asked:

"Got an axe?"

"Yas, suh," drawled Abe.

"Well, get to work now and chop up these rails, build a roaring fire, while we go for food and things. We will be back in half an hour." Jumping into the auto, B. sent her along at her best. He bought two warm gowns for the women, two warm

suits for the men, and something furry for 'Rastus. He also purchased flour, bacon, coffee, bread, a bottle of brandy, and a turkey, remarking to me with a bright smile as he secured the last: "Comic papers have left me with the impression that niggers like turkeys." He seemed to be the dominant mind on this occasion. I simply did as I was told. We raced back, having been gone forty minutes. Do you know darkies, Percy? If so, it was as you might expect, — the three rails lay untouched where we had left them. Entering, we found the four just the same; they had not made a move. The only excuse Abe had to make, was:

"I'd rather die dis way dan be shot," and Wash, the other negro, sagely nodded his head. B. pounced on the axe like a tiger on its prey, and the chips flew like sparks

from a fat wood fire. "Can you make coffee?" he asked me.

"Yes."

"Then make it."

In ten minutes we had a fire of which a backwoodsman might have been proud. The water bubbled, the bacon sizzled, and the turkey graciously thawed. He gave each of the four a horn of brandy that brought tears to their eyes.

It was particularly pleasant to watch them return to life. We turned our backs and made the women put on their new warm gowns. The two men calmly put on their new suits over their old as if they could not be warm enough. Then we waited for the things to cook, listening in the lulls of the wind to the auto outside, which was making that noise which reminded one of the purring of a gigantic cat.

When all was ready we started to leave, but Martha and Lucretia's indignation at this knew no bounds.

"You gwine to eat your food with us," cried Martha, "yas, you is; you think us coloured folks ain't got no manners, but we has."

B. gave me an inquiring glance. I nodded; so down we all sat on the floor and fell to with a will. When the bones of the turkey stood out unprotected like the rail fence that had done it to a turn, and the brandy had made their stomachs as hot as the stove in a country store, their tongues became untied. When we finally rose to go, B. slipped something into Abe's hand, muttering, "That will pay for the rails," and then, yes, and then he kissed the sleeping 'Rastus good-bye.

When we were about half-way home, B. turned to me and said:

“ I’m more of a puzzle to you than ever, am I not? Well, I’ll give you one pointer. I am descended from a long line of beasts on my father’s side, and a long line of angels on my mother’s. When the bad side is up, it is as if the good side never existed, and *vice versa*.”

I was filled throughout the whole day with a sickening fear that, situated as I am with his wife, I might learn to like this man. Explain him to me if you can.

The Leyland, Friday.

You see I have changed my hotel — perhaps you think I ran away from the B.’s, but you are wrong. The Berrington disappeared in a blaze of glory last night. It is now a pile of ashes and well-baked bricks,

larded with iron pipes that are now as crooked as they once were straight. When I left the place to-day, the boiler was standing on end in the middle of the débris, like Marius surveying the ruins of Carthage. On its upper end rested most coquettishly a white porcelain bath-tub. It looked like a mammoth old lady in mourning, wearing a white poke bonnet. As I seem to have acquired the habit of telling you everything, I suppose you will expect me to describe this, my last experience.

Thursday night, I was awakened in my room on the second floor by the most infernal racket; every one seemed knocking on everybody's door. As I turned over in my bed I remember muttering, "There must be about four hundred people catching the early train. Reminds me of Spain,

where the trains all leave at four in the morning." There came a bang on my door that made me sit up as if some one had stuck a knife into my vitals; in a moment I had the door open. There stood a coloured hall-boy, his complexion a sort of pepper and salt, with the white getting the better of the black. He yelled the word "Fire" as loud as would a captain of infantry two hundred yards ahead of his troops. "Don't stop to get anything, but skip." The noise outside now became deafening. Every one was yelling at the top of his voice. "Where's Julia?" "Has Edward gone down?" A man with one leg was calling pitiably, "For God's sake, help me, I'm lame," and all the time he was making giant hops down the hall on his good leg that would have distanced a sprinter. I have never seen so many pa-

jasas and night-dresses together before. The smoke, like a pall studded with rubies, lay over all, and in the distance could be heard the cracking of the advancing flames. On with my slippers and down the stairs I rushed; the balustrades were burning briskly and the smell of varnish was pungent. Out of the front door I plunged, then back as quickly; the vision of a certain face had come between me and safety. I flew back to the hotel office; the clerk was emptying the safe of money and papers.

“Have you seen the B.’s?” I asked. He “reckoned” not. They might have gone out and they might not. If they had not already, it was too late, as the fire broke out on the fifth floor and they were on the tenth. The fifth floor was just hell. The number of their rooms? Oh, yes, 404, 406, 408. His indifference maddened me. If

I ever see him again I'll brighten him up generally. What was I to do, with the way to the tenth floor impassable? An inspiration, — the elevator, — I found it deserted; the boy had left his post. I jumped in; would it work, that was the question, would it work? As I pulled the wire rope and gently ascended I gave one war-whoop of delight. I could hardly see the numbers on the doors, the smoke was so dense. I found the B.'s in the outer room facing the street, both unconscious on the floor. They had evidently tried to raise the window and failed. I threw open the window and dragged him to it, resting his head upon the sill; the bitter wind blew in on him fiercely. I tore a blanket from the bed in the next room, soused it in the bath-tub, and wrapping her in it, carried her to the elevator. Thank God, it was still there; down we

went in safety and out of that furnace into the street. I placed her in the arms of a fireman, and turned and gazed up at the doomed building. Should I go back for him? Yes. Should I go back for him? No. Should I tell a fireman? Yes. Should I tell a fireman? No. Never did I hate him as I did then. I turned to look for her. They had taken her away, probably to some neighbour's house. I made my way through the crowd and walked along the street. I walked fast; I must get away from the picture of him helpless, with his head resting on the sill.

He had no right to live, the world would be better for his death. I was doing the world a kindness. I was bringing to her a blessing she would thank me for. He would never try to strike her again. Damn him! I walked faster, but the pic-

ture kept pace. Suddenly God laid His hand upon my shoulder and I turned and ran — ran as I never ran before, back, back to the hotel, back to the room where he lay awaiting me, and only me, for no one else should save him. Once more I plunged through the crowd, dodging two firemen who tried to stop me. The elevator would still run. I gave another yell of delight as it mounted, but my breath scorched me. Whatsoever I touched blistered my hands. I found him on his hands and knees just returning to consciousness; trying to raise himself. I helped him; for a moment he stood dazed, then the light broke into his mind as it does into a darkened room when the shutters are thrown open. “Come this instant,” I cried. “We have not a moment to lose.” Just then we heard a tremendous crash that shook the tottering

walls of the whole house. Oh, yes! I knew what had happened, the elevator had dropped to the bottom of the well; something had burned out and it had fallen. I rushed to see and found it so. I could hardly find my way back through smoke. When I entered and closed the door he was standing with his hands behind his back in the middle of the room.

"Elevator gone?" he inquired, with seeming indifference.

"Yes."

"Prisoners here?"

"Yes."

"Death?"

"Certain," I answered.

"Well," he continued, "I'm rather curious to see how you will take it. How do you propose to be cooked, roasted or

broiled? You're a very dry man, I think you'll need a sauce."

I did not answer, but went to the window and looked down; out of every window below us burst those vanishing but recurrent lances of flame. When the crowd saw me, a mighty roar went up; every hand was upraised and pointing. It looked as if some one were taking the ayes and noes of a mighty congress.

"Don't jump," some one bawled; "ladders are coming."

"Don't jump!" snarled B. "The idiot! what does he think we are, parachutes?"

I looked down again; some were fixing the ladders, but I knew the time was too short for us to be saved, and some were arranging an additional hose. A woman stepped forward to get a better view and stepped on the hose near a small rent; the

pressure from the hydrant was turned on suddenly, the rent gaped and the water inflated her frock so that for a moment she looked like an old-fashioned pincushion of the days when crinolines were the mode. The crowd went into convulsions of laughter. The woman disappeared and a little boy ran forward and slaked an imaginary thirst from the escaping water. I turned to B. again. He was groping through the smoke for something. He came toward me with his cigarette-case in his hand and some matches.

“Funny,” he remarked. “I never can find a match when I need one, and now that I am almost surrounded by fire they are the first things I put my hand on. Have a puff?” I took one; I proposed also to be as cool as the circumstances would permit. With a little laugh he said:

“Dayton, we had rather a cold afternoon, but the night is very compensating; it is becoming noticeably warmer, at least where we are. Do you know, I left instructions in my will to be cremated. Slightly unnecessary, don't you think so?”

Then he solemnly puffed for a moment or two, or I judged he did, by the movement of his mouth, for notwithstanding the open window and the gale of wind, it was impossible to differentiate his smoke from the hotel's.

Then he continued, in a calm voice:

“I read the other day of a man who had been cremated with the bullet in his body that had caused his death, and after this preliminary hell on earth, they found the little bit of lead outweighed all his ashes. God, Dayton! it won't be long before we will be as light as thistle-down and a part

of the air other people breathe. Whereas burial means a little mouth with straight lips cut in the face of the earth, where you are reverently placed and the earth swallows you down. That's all." Another silence, then he added:

"So you saved my wife first and then came back for me? Well, Dayton, my boy, doubtless you are a worthy gentleman, but you are a damned fool, all the same."

Somehow his flippancy sickened me. I was no more afraid than he, but to my mind it was no time to pose. However, men die differently.

Again I went to the window. This time I looked up. Could I reach the gutter that ran around the eaves of the house? I stood on the window-sill. Yes, if I dared jump up about six inches; if I missed,—well, then what the newspapers call "a dull, sickening

thud " and my worries over. I tried it, B. looking on with an effort at an uninterested expression, but I saw the light of hope in his eyes. I jumped and caught the gutter with the palms of my hands turned in. Then slowly I began to curl my body upward. I heard the crowd give one tremendous yell as they saw me make the effort, then absolute silence as they watched, but *I* saw nothing but the vision of her face. I got about three-quarters of the way, but my stomach muscles were not strong enough; slowly my legs dropped till they were straight again. I had failed. Then I heard B.'s voice. I could not turn my head to see, but I knew he must be standing on the sill.

"Try again," he called. "I'll give you a shove." Slowly once more I curled up, and when I was almost upside down I felt my head in the hollow of his hand and with

a mighty push I was on my belly on the roof. Keeping the same position, I told him to try. He did, and reached the same point I had, and failed, but I was ready for him; his leg came within reach; I grabbed it, and with a pull equal to his push we were side by side.

We slid back until we could stand in safety, but the roof was hot and burned our feet. We made our way to the house next to us, which was an office-building almost as tall as the hotel; we had to drop over eighteen feet, but we dropped into safety.

As we sat on the scuttle of the adjoining house and waited and shivered, he said:

“Rather a happy thought of yours, Dayton.” As he spoke, a fireman’s head appeared over the edge of the roof, and we were saved.

I am writing you at this great length, as I can’t go out — I have no clothes.

It is all over now and I could laugh if it were not for one thing. I walked away, Percy, and left him to die. I walked away. I shall never be able to forget that fact. If it had not been for God's quick thoughtfulness, I should have been lost.

Percy, the way of the transgressor is — soft. It is nothing but sliding down a greased hill with accruing filth.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

SEVENTEENTH LETTER

Boston, Mass.

MY DEAR DOUGLAS:—

I have your long letter. It is an exciting journal. It has been a habit of mine to say that any man who would write truthfully of his own life could not help producing a distinguished piece of literature. Those princes of epigram, the French, say that metaphysics is *l'art de s'egarer avec raison*. Most autobiography is merely the art of making oneself distinguished without valour. Your letters to me are of the quality that would make good autobiography. The Fates seem to have you in leash, and to be leading you, and letting you go, and bringing you back again, in a way that

makes me think I am reading one of those epicene Dumas efforts of the day, where effeminate Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan strut about, poor milk-and-water substitutes for the fiery brandy of their originals. But in your case it is true! You have been "skinning the cat" from the projecting gutters of high buildings on fire; you have been tempted of the Devil to let your enemy burn to death (I don't think I could have stomached that. If you had not gone back to that poor devil, I fear I should have distrusted you forever.) You have been rescuing the unfortunate, and discovering at the same time how inscrutable are the ways of men, as instanced by the man who lifts his hand to strike his wife one day, and weeps over an injured "nigger" baby the next. Would that we might remember that we never know all of any

man, no matter how insignificant, we who judge one another with the precision, cruelty, and carelessness of men who deem themselves endowed with omniscience.

You ask me what I think of this man. Tell it not in Gath, but I have a sneaking fondness for the man who went feeling about for his cigarette-case, when the house was on fire. It reminds me of the great Frederick, who said to some of his soldiers who hesitated to obey his order to attack on some particularly hazardous occasion: "What, do you fellows want to live forever!" In most countries to-day, life is the most absurdly overrated commodity in the market. Anything rather than death, rather than suffering, rather than hardship even! We have become so sentimental that we not only coddle ourselves, but we coddle criminals, the insane, the diseased, the per-

verted. We are moving toward that ideal civilisation where every man, woman, and child will be provided with an armour of cotton-batting at the expense of the state. No more war, no more pugilism, no more feats of endurance, no more football, no more shooting of game, is the cry! The only permissible struggle is that between men armed with stocks and bonds, and equipped with coolness, impudence, and lack of moral sense. To rob a whole community of men of hundreds of thousands of dollars is acknowledged to be a noble form of human endeavour, but to knock a man down in order to steal a loaf for a starving child is to open the gates of the penitentiary. The pretty young woman who tires of her husband takes a train for the divorce-court, and the husband may stay behind and bite his finger-nails, instead of

being permitted to lock her up in a closet on bread and water until she comes to her senses. We have an exaggerated notion of the perversity of the man who beats his wife, but may it not be true that here and there is a wife for whom a sound spanking were not too harsh a punishment? You know, after all, some women are fools even after they are married, as are many men!

This Mr. B. of yours may have a story to tell, who knows? I have noticed that it not infrequently happens that the hero who marries the much-abused-by-a-previous-husband heroine finds to his cost that his predecessor is often excused by his own experience. You see I am a little inclined to take a brief for the chap who lights a cigarette, jumps out of a ten-story window, catches the gutter and skins the cat on the roof, and lives to fight another day. Of

course, by the way, I expect you to do these things. Thus do we always minimise the goodness, or the greatness, or the courage of those we love! Such an one must have a little of the essence of devilry in him that makes this slow and timid old world go round. Don't you think so yourself? That kind of a man is probably ready to have another round with the world, no matter what punches he has had in former battles, and he is always a dangerous man to bet against. Of course I am not writing about your particular Mr. B. I do not know him. I do not know his wife. I never shall know, or see, either of them, this side of a miracle. But you seem to be cudgelling him frequently and heavily, and I only see your letters. I never see his! I never see him! I never see her! I am not one of those who willingly excuse the soft luxurious

flow of every idle passion. Why should not a woman stand by her plighted troth whether she likes it or not, and a man likewise? It seems to me always, when questions of this kind are brought to my notice, that the root of the trouble is never so much as touched upon. Marriage is not of divine origin, and parson though I be, I could not, without blushing, maintain such an exploded theory. As soon as you make marriage a sacrament you presuppose a state church, or at any rate, an institution with divine rights and with legal powers superior to those of the state, and we washed out that theory, that scheme of things, in blood long ago. But when a man gives his word of honour to a woman to protect her and not to run away from her, or when a woman pledges herself to keep herself for one man, and to stand by him come what may, then

when either one or the other breaks the contract, the divine thing, the truth, the honour, the very key to stability of character, are made as nothing. Nobody would maintain, I take it, that when one party to a contract breaks the contract, the other party is held and bound as before. To me that is the awful thing about all these questions between men and women. The weakness of character, the lack of hang-on-edness, the wateriness of the moral muscles behind these breaks and betrayals, these are the serious features. Hence it is that the making of laws on the subject is idle. What such men and women must have is a new form of moral oatmeal to eat, some new spiritual tonic to take. The newspaper notoriety, the preaching of your fancy city clerics, the exaggerated accounts on all sides, these avail nothing. Such troubles are only

one of many indications of a general moral weakness. You may see other symptoms of the same disease at the opera any night; you may see it in Wall Street or State Street any day between ten and three; you may see it in the ill-mannered, uncontrolled children of flabby parents.

We know and associate with men who, they or their fathers, have come by their money by downright thievery, only it goes by another name. Our wives and daughters are often in the company of men, if they go about much, whom we know to be dissolute, and in not a few instances downright depraved. All this points to the same thing, which is the natural tendency of every rich society to make and keep life soft and easy; and what a soft and easy life portends, what it results in, is writ large over the history of every ancient civili-

sation. That's the reason, I say, I like a little war, a little pugilism, a little football, a little roughing of it for men. No danger that they will be too hard, too rough, too ungente. The danger to us all of the better classes is, that we shall prove too soft, too smooth, too mild. That is the reason I hate to think of you as entangled in one of these cushioned intrigues. There is nothing brave or virile about it. If you galloped off with the lady at your saddle-bow, with bullets following and sabres clanking behind, there would be some risk, some backbone there. But the only thing you have to fear is the divorce-court, and what a poor effeminate beast is that! It is not even as though you had done anything to earn this woman. You have not worked for her, won anything for her, sought the Holy Grail for her. You and she have just

dropped into osculatory intimacy just out of sheer softness. What are you proposing to do in case you get her? Will you make a fortune for her, will you make a name for her, will you really deserve her and show the world that you did deserve her, or, after the customary lunar space of soft dalliance, will you both stare and wonder why you wanted one another at all?

This is the kind of a letter, perhaps, that tends to make a man angry, the kind that makes a breach in the oldest friendship, but it is not to be so between us. Poor me, I am preaching a doctrine of courage to you, my small parish, with no hope of ever being able to exhibit any courage of a physical kind. You are bound to pity me. You are bound to feel that I am so little a man physically now, that these letters of mine to you are almost impersonal.

May I break in here to tell you that I have quite lost the use of my legs now; they merely dangle from my trunk? I am a baby, and I can see from the kindness, the exaggerated gentleness of those who are about me, and of those who come to me, that they have heard that the image of death is behind me, and becoming more and more visible each week, perhaps each day, for aught I know. Now, my dear Douglas, a man like that has no vanities to guard, he has no prejudices to fight for, he has no enemies to punish. So far as a man can be, he is set apart from life and feels it as though it were the stream slipping away with the boat of his life to a harbour that he can almost see. Why, then, should I say the smallest word to offend you? How can you imagine me as other than embodied friendship, or as a poor

parson struggling with the problems of his last parish?

Pardon that much even about myself, and let me bid you read what I have written to you here and in other of my letters carefully. I have no word of blame for the man who dares it all, who shouts *alea jacta est* and peers at the dice unafraid, to see whether he has won or lost. If you know what you want, believe you have a right to take it, trust yourself to deserve it once you have it and are willing to fight the battle through, come what may, why, then, mind you, my dear Douglas, I shall stand by until my frail skiff drifts out to sea for good. There is moral stamina in that way of facing the world, even though a man be wrong. For even all our ethical standards are man-made. What is right in Boston

is not right in Bulgaria; what is right in Seringapatam is wrong in West Braintree.

Now, if you are big enough and brave enough to make your own right and wrong, you will find that the world will acknowledge you as one of its lawmakers. Alexander did it, Cæsar did it, Napoleon did it, Frederick the Great, Cromwell, Lincoln, Paul Jones, Catherine of Russia did it, — men and women without number have done it, and more will do it. Such personalities are the world's medicines. The world, the soft, luxurious, conservative, fearful, calf-like part of it, at least, shrinks from taking these bitter draughts at first, but takes them at last because it finds it must do so to keep in health. Justinian and Napoleon even take the whole body of laws by which men live and codify them.

Luther, with his hammer, and Erasmus,

with his rapier, upset and chase out of court the most powerful spiritual autocracy the world ever saw. The Wesleys and Whitefield make the great State Church of the Anglo-Saxon race ashamed, and the day is not far off when our coddled clergy and effeminate ministries will be swept into the sea by some band of consecrated men who dare to believe something, and who will sacrifice themselves to do something hard. This sentimental nonsense in the church, in morals, in philanthropy, about hurting people's feelings, hurting people's bodies, — this whole philosophy of pampering, which is the very body of death, will go. You know and I know, in our heart of hearts, that men who really mean business, no matter what their task or profession, think little of wages and salaries, eating and drinking, and society and the modern bugaboo of

exercise. When a painter has a picture in his brain, or a poet a poem, when a Savonarola has a principle to fight for, or an engineer a bridge to build, or an Edison a problem to work out, or a lover a real love in his heart, he is glorified, and recks not of eating and drinking, thinks not of the soft things of life; he becomes the happy warrior who does, and dares, and dies if necessary.

If this is what you stand for, I am with you! I lay aside any right or any desire to judge you from a professional standpoint. I waive the point of what the world may say, of what the world holds to be right even, and I bid you Godspeed if you are a king, ready for the consequences and responsibilities of a king who is about to carve out a kingdom for himself. You see I have a weakness for a real man, and have only

contempt for an amorous baby. You see, too, that I am not criticising, I am not passing judgment; I am leaving it all to you to decide. If you are dead in earnest, ready to risk everything, and you will risk everything, and then, above all, ready to bear your burden, and to take your knocks, and to shoulder your way through the crowd again with a bright eye, a cheerful smile, and a glad heart, then you are one of God's own children, with whom I have no business to interfere. He will take care of His own. You wrote in one of your letters that I trusted my own judgment; you intimated that I had no moments of hesitation in my moral or spiritual life. I need not say that is not altogether true. I am as weak as other men. But of a man's right to his own life, his own beliefs, his own God, of a man's right to be captain of his own soul, I have

no shade of a shadow of a doubt. Few men dare accept such responsibilities; that's all I meant. But for the men who do, whether I agree with them or not, I have the most profound admiration. I deem them to be the salt of the earth; they give life its savour, make it taste good, and I will have no words with such men.

I would not have you think, in spite of all this, that I am not distressed by this last chapter of your life. If I were writing or talking to the woman, rather than to the man, in this particular case, I should not take the attitude I have taken with you. No woman has any right, unless she be one of those great Amazons, of which there are only a few in each century, to undertake a battle with the world. Unlike the man, she merely grasps at her new pleasure, and, getting it, loads it upon the back of him

she loves, and leaves him to carry the whole burden. It must be so. Her heroism is not in taking up the burden, in swinging the sword, in defying the world, — her heroism must lie in giving up what she longs for, in pushing from her the passion, though it be as dear to her as to him, in saving the man from his own madness. It is as though one human being should consent to some perilous adventure, knowing that the partner in the affair must carry it through. Yes, I will go with you, says the maiden to the youth. They push off in their small boat, and it is he, not she, who must steer, must trim the sail, must meet the seas as they curl above him, and beat down upon him, and blind him with their spray. She merely loves him, but he must love her and shelter her, and have one arm ever ready for her, while at the same time he battles for his

life. She must be a goddess, indeed, who will ask this of any man, or permit any man, no matter how fierce his passion, how enthusiastic his willingness, to sweep her away upon such a terrible journey.

There is, they tell me nowadays, a means of measuring the waves of light, of measuring the very act of thinking, of measuring even a man's nervousness, but, my dear boy, until there is a machine to measure the duration of love, of passion, of this fever of desire of man for woman, of woman for man, any such undertaking as yours is, of all things, the most problematical. No matter how godlike the man, no matter how angel-like the woman, what you want changes its raiment when it becomes what you have. Then comes the test, the strain. Then the woman knows the man as he knows himself, and the man knows the

woman, as man may know woman, and, if there be nothing solid, if there be none of the strong, dependable traits of character, not your mere kissable things, but things to eat, to nourish, to strengthen, to respect, then comes satiety on the wings of the wind.

I beg that you will not think me hard or cold, a mere calculator of chances when so much is at stake. I know you might as well expect to pick up the *Iliad*, after throwing the letters of the Greek alphabet upon the floor, as to see the end that will result from these complications. But I am fighting myself to help you. I am trying my best to guide you and to speak to you, not as I think you wish to be spoken to, not as habit or custom or even the ethical principles of the day suggest, but as an honest man would speak to him he loves, and for whom he would be wise and merciful, even as is

the great Judge of all. I am weary these days; the sensations of life are not for me; surely mine is the harvest of a quiet eye, if such a harvest there be, and I grow less sure that right is always what men say it is, or that wrong is always what we call wrong. I only know that it cannot be false in me to bid you be a man, — a man who can throw back his head and put up his face to heaven and look God in the eye.

I shall hope to hear from you soon again. You must read what I have written, though here and there it be harsh, or even contemptuous, to one or both of you people, feeling my arm over your shoulder.

Yours,

PERCY DASHIEL.

EIGHTEENTH LETTER

Washington, D. C.

DEAR PERCY: —

You tell me to read your letters carefully, to learn and inwardly digest. I do, all but the last; I cannot digest them. In my present condition I throw them off. I have known a typhoid convalescent to die of a bowl of bread and milk, and you expect me to digest a surfeit of good advice, and I, not a convalescent, only a patient approaching a crisis. There is a time to preach, and a time for silence. If Blondin were crossing Niagara on a wire, you would not yell directions from the shore. Also there is a time when a physician drops medications, and watches in silence the heart action;

then is the moment when, knowing he has done his best, he waits to see if his patient goes under or over the fence. I am rising to the jump of my life; I may clear and land in clover; I may trip and land in hell. So far as I am concerned, it is "a condition, not a theory, that confronts you."

You regret the fact that Mrs. B. cannot ride on my saddle-bow, down Penn. Avenue, with the atmosphere all little holes, made by B.'s bullets. As for sabres, I am afraid he would have to borrow them from the army, or the presentation swords in the Congressional Library.

You have read too much "Don Quixote." Come back to earth, O Q., or learn the sense of Sancho, or, there is always the "quarries" for me.

Do not forget there can be strenuous love without strenuous life; besides, it appears

to me that, what with my experiences in Aiken and Washington, all the strenuity I need has been injected into my life of late.

Your sermons are stones flung at a conscious sinner. Keep your stones, and prepare your oil to pour into the wounds of an erring friend. You would not kick a man when he is down; don't sermonise him while the battle is on. He needs encouragement then, and advice afterward. A clergyman is an habitual debauchee where advice is concerned. There are no men in the world who need to learn the value of silence at critical moments so much as God's deputies. With the majority of your cloth, I am not in sympathy. I was teased into going to church the other day, for the first time in ten years, to listen to an "eminent divine." A good, vain phrase, that. After listening for awhile, I discov-

ered I was the meanest of God's creatures; I was the essence of all selfishness, a sort of human hog; I was hopeless and incorrigible. He called us by implication names that could not have passed unnoticed nor unchallenged in a club, where one man's privileges are no greater than another's. Then, having humbled us sufficiently, he changed his note, and, if all the stops in an organ had been pulled out at once, the volume of sound could not have been greater, as he cried, "Give, give!" Why, the two daughters of the horse-leech never cried, "Give, give!" more passionately. It seemed to me that the only way to heaven was to crawl through an empty purse. Should there remain but one lonely dollar bill, it would entangle our feet as we crawled, and impede our progress. The price of redemption was not repentance,

but the limit of our wealth. He seemed to advertise himself as a "go-between," and he would "see" his boss about us, if we would "see" him. "Your money or your life," is the cry of the highwayman. "Your money or no everlasting life," is the clergyman's cry. When the plate was passed, I had intended to contribute twenty-five dollars, so in a little way to make up for absent Sundays, but he had made me feel so hopelessly a hog that it was useless to try to be anything else, so I gave twenty-five cents. Such men are pulpit Circes.

Now please don't imagine these comments reflect upon you in any way. You are a man who commands my respect and admiration in as many ways as there are points to a compass. I would change places with you and thank God, and yet — and yet

I should not like to be as sure about anything as you are about everything.

At present try to please me by being more gentle with me. I know this will go against the grain, but, if you want to please a person, please him his way, not yours; until you are willing to do this, don't try at all, for you are only pleasing yourself, not him. I remember when I was a boy, my father gave me a dollar, and then told me how to spend it. I wished it back in his pocket. I had a pet foolish investment for that dollar that would have given me infinite joy, and he had robbed me of it.

You speak in your letter of "coddling criminals." I assisted once at a "coddling." A good-looking mulatto man had murdered his benefactress. Kneeling on her breast, he had very thoroughly choked the life out of her. He was tried and convicted, and was

in murderers' row in the Tombs. Some young women, friends of mine, insisted they must feast their eyes upon so gallant a creature. "Would I take them?" "No, I would not." Then they would go alone. I went. The victim of the law received them very kindly, and held pleasing converse with them between the bars, showing when he smiled two rows of brilliant teeth, which excited whispered comments of admiration. I was compelled to empty my pockets of all my matchless cigars, which were placed in his throttling hands by the guiltless hand of a girl. Much encouraged, they went on to the next cell, where an Italian was tarrying on his way to his Lord. As a slight correction, he had cut his wife's throat because his polenta had been overcooked. At the sight of the girls, his delight was boundless. Beckoning them to

come nearer, he waited until all their lovely faces were pressed between the bars; then, with the accuracy and precision of an American man-of-war at gun-practice, he spat in each and every face before they could get away. I am sure this did him more good than the cigars did the other chap, so the girls should have been pleased, but they were not. They were a little indignant with him, but intensely so with me, for having brought them to such a place!

And now, my boy, let me speak for a moment about what you tell me of yourself and changed condition. You are ever in my thoughts; your face is a palimpsest over hers. I must lift your face in order to see hers. I cannot believe what you tell me. That Death stands behind you is true, but is it not true of all of us? If he has taken a step nearer you, he has also moved nearer

to us all. Don't loosen that mighty grip of yours. God may need you, but I need you more. The clergyman was right, I am selfish, but unselfishness is simply a capacity to separate yourself from yourself. When you can forget yourself, you remember others, but oh, forgive me, just now I cannot forget myself — I love her so.

But when, in the years to come, you do leave me, think of the rejoicing in heaven when your soul reaches home. Your thoughtful Lord will say, "Come ye yourself apart, and rest awhile." No more need of patience, no more need of courage, while I will be shaking hands with the Devil, and, like you, too, welcomed as worthy.

Sunday.

I went to see her yesterday at their new apartments. B. has gone to New York in

a suit of ready-made clothes, on business thoughts intent. Percy, where do women's clothes come from? Do they grow over night? For she was in the prettiest something I have ever seen. Was it a peignoir? was it a "robe of clouds?" The room was a bowl of sunshine. Percy, the sun loves her, even as the moon, even as I. A little canary carolled a song of welcome as I entered, its throat bursting with notes that made it seem to choke for utterance; they followed each other in rapid succession, until the room was a vibrating box of melody. Then it cocked its head on one side, and rested with even more self-satisfaction than a prima donna. The heart of my heart gave me her hand, and, before she withdrew it, said: "Even the bird knows who saved my life; she has thanked you, may I?" A rubber-tree in one corner, a vase of

ferns in another, a bunch of roses, a Persian rug, a wood fire that cracked in a painfully reminiscent way, an epitome of a larger fire we had been in together. Everything on her and about her was dainty and sweet-smelling; she reminded me of new-mown hay, which the more it is trampled the stronger the perfume. She is always perfection without effort. Percy, have you ever met any one mentally *bien soignée*? Her mind is so well groomed; intellect and intelligence draped with kindness of heart.

At last she said:

"You saved my husband, also."

"No," I answered. "We saved each other."

Lifting her eyes, she said:

"No, you went back for him."

"Yes," I admitted.

“Why? Was it for me, was it for him, was it for your sake, or for God’s?”

“For my sake,” I answered.

“I used to understand everything once upon a time; now I understand nothing,” she mused aloud.

“There is nothing to understand, except belated love has entered into our lives,” I told her.

“Should not this belated love be cast out? But, if so, where is the strength, alas! where the inclination? Right seems so far away, and wrong so close at hand. If the sense of right did its duty as steadfastly as the inclination to wrong, there would be fewer failures in this world. I fear the sense of right is one of the seven sleepers of Ephesus. I thought I loved my husband once, just for a little while; do I only think I love you

now? That would be a tragedy, would it not? ”

“ To think involves a question, a question a doubt; doubt and love have never walked hand in hand.”

“ I wonder,” she said, thoughtfully. “ Women give many things without knowing why, and many more things without recompense.”

“ Am I and my love no recompense? ”

“ Sometimes everything, and sometimes nothing. Sometimes I like brutality, and sometimes tenderness. I have known the time when I would rather have been struck than be kissed.”

“ I remember a time — ” I expostulated, but she interrupted:

“ Yes, and I, too; that was a time when I would rather have been kissed,” and she smiled.

The very recollection made all the bad in me rise like sediment that has been stirred, and rest like scum on water. How can a woman make *good* look out of her eyes when evil should? Women are not actresses; they don't need to be; they fall into beautiful, alluring shapes and forms like bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope when their emotions turn the crank.

"The institution of marriage," she continued, "as it is now is a mistake. As I read somewhere, marriage contracts should be drawn like leases, say for five years, with a privilege of renewal. Then the very fact that at the end of a certain time each would be at liberty to follow his or her own sweet will would prove to be the greatest safeguard. No two people love each other in exactly the same degree; so this plan

would keep the one who loves the more uncommonly polite and attentive."

"In case of separation, what would become of the children?" I asked.

"If there is more than one, divide them, or let the parent who so wishes take them all, or, better still, let the state take them and educate them, and bring them through teething, measles, scarlet fever, and whooping-cough. We could be heavily taxed for this purpose."

"You evidently," I said, "think parents devote too much time to their children. I agree with you. Each of us has but one life to lead, and why, when you are still young, should you merge it into the life of an uninteresting and sometimes ungrateful offspring? For a man marriage is a process of obliteration. A smart person once asserted that matrimony meant one woman

more and one man less. The first year your roast beef is of importance, the second year the baby's milk, and so on until you have faded away, and you realise that even the servants are of more importance. Of course you regain a little of your lost prestige in the eyes of your wife when the time comes for you to teach your children the earlier stages of arithmetic. About this time, the husband finds the substance of his life outside, and only the shadow at home. Another thing, children should be born ten years old, at the least. The length of their infancy is intolerable. Think of all those wasted years for them. In after times, they remember nothing of them; they might as well have been passed on another planet. The thousand and one sacrifices you have made for them are bunched together into the one idea, — you are a very nice papa

and mamma, or you are not. Only very, very good and at the same time untruthful people remember their infancy. As for me, I cannot remember my mother's knee as a throne of grace or a place of punishment, nor when I got my first long boots, or my first baseball bat, nor when I stole the jam. All good people remember when they stole the jam, but I must have been bad and did not steal the jam, or else jam wasn't invented."

You may say, dear Percy, that this was queer talk for lovers, but I have eliminated the passages that would make you frown, and only recorded those I hoped would make you smile. Never fear, there were moments that were precious to both, for remember, where love is concerned, the wickedest day of all the week is Sunday. You speak in your letter of the lack of a

machine to measure the duration of love. I need none; mine can be measured by the simple span of my life.

Washington, D. C.

Another Sunday a thousand years afterward.

I do not know whether I shall be able to write you all that has happened; whether it will prove a relief, or I shall revolt from it, I cannot tell; however, I shall try.

The day after my interview with her in Washington, I received a line, saying: "B. has telegraphed me to come on to New York. I leave on the 3.20." I looked at my watch; it was four. It would not do to follow so soon, so I wrote to her. I inclose you my letters to her, for, God help me, she sent them back to me. Here is the first: —

My Letter

“O my awakening, I salute thee, Dawn, for night it was before I met you. I was a man who thought life had no secrets hidden, but you taught me what it was to change from negative to positive happiness.

“Before I met you, my life had been rhythm, not music. Oh, the vast difference between the simple beat that marks the time and an ever whispering melody that is all love.

“Wordsworth writes of ‘The light that never was on sea or land.’ Dear heart, dear heart, he never saw it, but I have; ’twas the light in your eyes when first you found courage to say, ‘I love you.’

“I thought, when we parted, to forget you. What a waste of time! One cannot rub out mountains with a sponge. I have

given up the unequal struggle, and now find all the glory of my life in that imperial chain of hills that binds my heart to yours, for every mound is a memory, and every memory an everlasting joy. God bless you. He has me, insomuch as I have your love. Of course our love cannot be blessed of Heaven, so says the Lord, so says the law, but I do delight to think the Lord who made it knows when to forget as well as when to forgive. The law was made for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but we, just for our little lives, wish to be selfish and think only of the happiness of two.

“ My beloved, I know what awaits us, — some day, for you, a sweet lavender memory, but I will be like a lost soul in space that has missed the road to heaven.

“ I live no lie; I am simply an expres-

sion that spells heaven in your presence and hell in your absence. It is amusingly strange how God's best gift, love, is of all things exclusive. It is the reduction of the universe to two people. 'The tender grace of the days that are dead will never come back to me.' Dead they may be, but buried, never. I must sit in years to come a dead man alone with a live memory.

"I have always thought propinquity and contact fired a man, and absence and imagination fired a woman, but since we parted, I know that no actual experience of my life equals the simple memory of your eyes.

"God is love, God is mercy. He gave us the first; for us in the end must He keep the latter.

"Let that peace which passeth all under-

standing be always yours, as I am, and ever shall be."

Here is her answer:—

"Your letter received and contents noted. You say I am not businesslike, but you see I am.

"I am in a mood. Being a woman, of course I am in a mood. Your letter, though inexpressibly sad, has made me marvelously happy. I must be frivolous; sometimes it serves as a safety-valve. The two extremes in a woman are farther apart than in a man; she can be happier and infinitely more miserable. Once in a long while, her happiness chokes the very arteries of her heart; then she must dance it off. Then it is that caprice, frivolity, and in consequence save her from folly. Do you know

there is very little pride in man's love, but in a woman's love pride takes an important place. If she be not proud of the man and of his love, she may know passion but nothing more. *I* am so proud. You are a king over a kingdom of one subject. Are you content? Remember, dear, there is a great difference between an autocrat and a despot; because I curtsy to you in soul, mind, heart, and body, don't become a tyrant.

"You say you are 'like a dead man alone with a live memory.' For shame! To me you are a living actuality, and always will be, present or absent. I don't think men are so clever, because they complain that women are incomprehensible. I never heard a woman say that of a man, did you, my lord?

"God gave man intellect and woman intuition. The latter works quicker and saves

time, and it is well, for a woman's heart so soon grows old, and a man's so soon grows cold. I used to regret that what was past was irrevocable, but now I revel in the fact that our little past is fixed in our minds for all time. Those days were a part of my life; they are now all my life. I only regret I did not realise more fully at the time that I was in sight of heaven. Why was I not a good Mahometan, down on my knees five times a day, thanking God for having brought you into my life? When did a woman realise at the time? It is this incapacity that has made all the bad women in the world.

“You say our love ‘cannot be blessed of Heaven.’ How do you know, omniscient one? Wait and see. I know I never felt so near my God as now. Love and religion go hand in hand in a woman's heart. I feel

bathed in the sunshine of His grace; nothing in my life has been taken away, but something added of unspeakable value. Does he so reward the undeserving? Please say, 'Never.'

"When you can, come to me. I will radiate an atmosphere of welcome. I will abase myself, I will glorify myself in your honour. Come, for I love you."

I wrote to her again as follows:—

"I am inclined to use a diminutive to you for the first time, your letter was so wholesomely childish. Don't be annoyed, remember a child's chief charm is in the fact that it has so lately left heaven, to which we some day hope to go. Later, friction with the world rubs the nap off. You, dear heart, have a child's soul, a woman's heart,

and a man's intuition. You see, I claim for a man intuition, perhaps of a superior quality to that possessed by a woman; but, if you doubt it, as you say to me, 'wait and see.'

"Listen: with a man, passion unconsciously precedes love; with a woman it is the reverse, and sometimes with her the former is long in coming. The man who is successful with women is not the man who cries, like one in the wilderness, I want, I wish, but one who waits with perfect self-control until he hears this cry whispered by the lips of the woman he loves. If a besieging lover has patience, perhaps he may have success. Perfect love is a flower, of which passion is the stem, but women and men arrive at perfection by a different procedure.

"This is intuition, or how should I, so

long unloved, unsung, be so wise, unless it is true that *one* woman can teach to a man all that all women know? Perhaps you, O God-given, are responsible for this newly acquired knowledge, that — strange — I seem always to have possessed.

“There is very little more for me to tell you, dear. You know that where you are, the world is a garden; where you are not, a desert. ‘To keep Time’s perishing touch at bay,’ I have only to think of you, but when my turn comes at last to answer the Judge of Judges, I shall point to the one glory of my life, and say: ‘I won her love; is it not enough?’”

Washington, D. C.

I could stand the separation no longer, so I followed her on to New York. The night after my arrival I went to the opera

with her. What happened you can judge by my next letter to her, which I inclose: —

“ Good-bye, good-bye, — the words keep clanging in my ears like the maddening iteration of a brain-beating bell. Good-bye means ‘ May God be with you.’ When you so spoke to me last night, and added, ‘ for all time,’ I wonder was God with you. I doubt it. As I understand it, we are not to see each other again. We are to crush out, to stamp out, to destroy our love for one another, as the progress of a forest fire is arrested, in order to save other things supposedly more valuable, — that you may keep your conscience unspotted, that you may regain the habit of looking your husband straight in the eye, that I may keep unstained a dull, lustreless reputation. This may be wisdom, and it may not. How can

I tell that our happiness is something less important than a clear conscience? My conscience has been comparatively clear for years. Has it brought me happiness? If it has, it has been of a quality I could not realise, whereas you have set the world to music for me. This may not be clear to you. I cannot make things clear to-day, my brain feels so old, so very old — and all this you chose to say to me in the entr'actes of an opera! What a little difference environment makes to a woman. As you spoke, I felt as if the very essence of life were passing away from me. I felt, as you took my heart out and analysed it, like a subject on an operating-table to whom no anæsthetic has been given. The crowds in the galleries seemed to me like the curious faces in the amphitheatre of a clinic. They fastened their eyes on me, not on the stage, and one

man, not a woman, only one man, looked sorry as I died before his eyes. Oh, God! I hope they have learned something, otherwise I have died in vain.

“For a moment my arm became nerveless; I could not write. I have been out for a walk. What is the matter with all the world? They look at me and they act as if in the presence of death; they speak in subdued voices. Can they have guessed the truth? Do they know I died last night? With me, this is not death, of course; it is only loneliness carried to the point of death. I cannot tell you what the loneliness is like. Friends have fallen away from me to-day, like leaves from a sapless tree. I feel as if my soul were bared to a sightless world, and no one knew and no one cared that my soul was a soul in pain. I feel as if my horizon had lost all undulation and be-

come a straight line, and I seem to be nearing the edge with giant strides, but without curiosity. Why is everything so still? I never knew such a soundless day. I hear nothing but the bell that says, 'Good-bye.'

"What new trick is this of God's? What right has He to torture who calls Himself mercy?

"Oh, God! Give her back to me; I say give her back to me, I say give her back to me, or I will fit my soul for hell. I will see You gain nothing; You shall lose.

"Oh, dear God, give her back to me!

"I now know why I hear the bell so clearly; my skull is the bell, and the tongue hits either side. Oh, dear heart, if it were only not so regular! Could it but miss a stroke, something to break the awful rhythm. If it is to be always with me, it must learn to say, 'I love you, I love you.'

“ I have waited a moment and listened. I have tried to teach it, but it won't learn. I shall go mad, for it still clangs with fearful distinctness, ‘ Good-bye, good-bye! ’ ”

New York.

She was kind enough to reply. I make no comment; it is for you to judge.

“ DEAREST: —

“ I never meant to write to you again, but your letter requires a word — a final word. A man's love is all selfishness, a woman's all sacrifice; with a man it means possession, with us peace. I wrote you that ‘ I never felt so near my God as now. ’ Blind at the time, I mistook you for my God. We women do that sometimes.

“ There is no peace for a cultivated conscience that is not clear.

“ You have your work, I my religion; they must suffice. The earth, ‘ God’s footstool,’ slipped away from under my feet when I met you, but the very love I bear you has led me — not to you — but back to the spot on which I stood so firmly before I knew you. I am so glad for your sake.

“ The tension of the last few hours has been too great. Something in your brain has snapped, but it will mend; it will heal in time, only wait.

“ I suppose you think I have grown wonderfully philosophical for a woman who could never lay claim to philosophy before, but wisdom must come to a woman quickly, or not at all. Do not think I have ceased to love you; you would be wrong. It is simply that my feeling for you has merged into something greater, my love of God, or all that’s good.

“A woman’s love is always hysterical, whether for God or man, but not necessarily ephemeral. The light that floods my eyes now, and shuts you off, enables me to see the value of things in their true perspective.

“Again, ‘For all time, good-bye.’”

And here is my last word to her:—

“Women are never selfish, except unconsciously so. I say this because it is the custom in this country to exalt women at the expense of truth.

“I am quite healed, for which I thank your last letter. I feel like a typhoid patient, who has been cured by an iced bath. You remind me of a pivoting prism, but the side that is toward me now reflects no light. Your iridescent love is your God’s just now, I believe.

“Hitherto I have cultivated my memory; hereafter it shall be forgetfulness, for in this world it is better to know how to forget than how to remember.

“A woman’s capacity to disengage herself from a fact and embrace a theory is worthy of everything but emulation. The fact that I loved you seems to have been absolutely lost sight of in your theories about right and wrong. I do not judge you, I only wonder. Our natures and dispositions are so different, one from the other, that to sit in judgment is an assumption of the rights of God.

“You cannot take away from me the love I bear for the woman I once knew, any more than you can steal the memory of some music that has become a part of my life, but do not grieve over this; it is only a fact that you can readily ignore. God has given you

a conscience; has He one of His own? If so, some things He permits on this earth must give it many a season of unrest!"

Quick, quick, Percy, to my aid. Write immediately, or shall I come to you? I said I was quite healed; I lied, from a pride I had not. Once in an abattoir I saw the heart of a bullock torn from the warm flesh and thrown on the ground; it quivered from the cold. Oh, I am so cold, so cold! Make haste.

Yours,

DOUGLAS.

NINETEENTH LETTER

Boston, Mass.

MY DEAR DOUGLAS: —

To say that I am sorry is merely the rough way of language to express to you my grief. I have no preachments for a man torn and hurt as you are. What did it, who did it, whether there is a right or wrong, matters not, now that you are wounded and sore-hearted. Of course you may come to me, if you can. How gladly I would go to you, or take you away somewhere if I could. What a bundle of sorrows is that sheaf of letters, — your own bone thrown back at you, and this strange woman more of an enigma than ever, at least to me. I have so little experience of women that I must

needs write to you very roughly, apparently, merely because this woman and all women are theories to me. They express a right or a wrong, and there my experience stops short. My mother, as you know, was an angel, gentle, patient, forgiving, sober-minded, married young, dead before she was forty, and leaving a memory that made all women sacred to the males of her household. Katharine, my sister, with more experience of the world, is not unlike her, gentle, forgiving, seeing no evil, about whom the trials and troubles of her household and of her friends flock as naturally as birds about a lighthouse. This friend of yours, whose letters I am very glad to read, because they give me the only glimpse I am ever to have of her now, she seems to me different. You may be wrong in accusing her of flippancy, of hardness, though.

There are some natures who find it of all things the hardest to let themselves go, to speak out their love, to express their affection, to show the fidelity of thought and longing, which is in reality part of their being. Have you not seen men and women both, who seemed unable to express freely their deepest and best, who were wrapped up in their self-control, and who had to tear open the doors of their hearts, even to those whose images were locked therein? I have known one or two such people. My maternal grandfather was such an one. Stern, strict, unforgiving, hard, and yet passionate, fond of his own, and as unable to show the little graces of affection as though he were without language. I sympathise with this superficially hard, though really loving and affectionate temperament. I know something of its trials myself. I never found it

easy, even in my immediate surroundings, to make the children, my nieces and nephews, or even my sister and brother, to know how hearty was my affection. No one loves affection more than I, and yet few, I ween, express it more awkwardly, more coldly. It is all dull, crumbling, dusty lava outside, but with a fire to consume a village inside. Perhaps this woman who has hurt you so is like that. I am unwilling to believe that mere flippancy, mere indifference is at the bottom of this change. It seems to me that I can read between the lines of her letters the effort to appear cold, to defend herself from what really frightens her by a show of thoughtlessness, by a supercilious trifling, that are not at all her real self. Not that I would defend her, my dear boy. Not that she has not done right. Not that you will not find it so some

day, no matter how black it all is now. But now I am only your friend, and the world and its conventions, or even its laws, must go for the moment. "My brother and I quarrel, but it is my brother and I against the world," runs the Arabic proverb. It is you and I against the world now, until you are healed and sound in heart and mind again. Can you not go away now, and get out of the environment where there is a chance of you two meeting again? Do not, I beg of you now, become fired with the mad desire to grasp and pull and tear this volatile, or seemingly volatile, person back into your life again. Men are sometimes, I think, maddened by the mere lust of pursuit. They follow and hunt down their love, as they would a wild beast that they wound and which escapes. They then become untiring in pursuit. The beast that

is wounded is the one they will have and none other, though hundreds of others haunt the forest. But this is all of life to me, I hear you say. It is not the chase; it is not hunting; it is life or death. Believe it not. Life has many corners, and when we come to the one we take to be the last, we turn it to find still another and yet another, and perhaps peace awaiting us behind one or another where we least expected to find it.

“ Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

“ For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

“ And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

You are a young man yet, far too young to live in despair, to give way to cynicism, to become suspicious, to think ill of men and women, to doubt their affection, to feel yourself wounded mortally and finally, and with no more battle in you, no more capacity to love and trust. I will not have that happen to you; that must not be your fate, just because a careless slingsman has caught you in the forehead with a pebble.

I thank you for your confidence in me, and for the real affection shown in sharing with me your miseries. One shares one's joys with all the world, but one's sorrows with the heart's own family, and what a small one it is, as one travels on the other side of forty. Bring me what you will. It makes me feel myself of more use in the world, as though I had a task, a duty, a parish again, to whom I mean something,

for whom I stand for something. Perhaps I could do more if I had my strength, if I could walk, if I could grasp the problem physically and not merely mentally, but somehow I itch to get up and move now. It is like being chained, while savages maul those you love. It is hard for me to tell you this, but what a poor thing am I now if I give not the best I have.

I loved a woman once. She loved me, or thought she did. I was not unlovable in those days — I mean it was not preposterous, as it is now. I have some brown bundles of letters that some day, when I am gone, I have left it to you to burn. I have not the heart to do it myself. But somehow, as I went on in my life, she seemed to have less and less interest in it and in me, and I did what you will perhaps think cruel or even unmanly. I gave her cause of offence.

I wrote sneeringly, cynically; I made out that I was even less interested in her, and one day there was a break and tears, and I have been empty-hearted ever since. I knew then it was best for her, and the years have proved me right, because God knows she is happier now than if she had been tied to me. You see men and women do strange things. Even I, your father in God, have deceived a woman, and wilfully, though then I could have flung myself to death for her. Some one may be torturing you now for your own good, for her own good, entangling ever more herself and you in the impossible task of unravelling God's wars with his children. I am bitter with myself when I think that I was writing coldly, analytically, and fingering over your nerves at a time when you were overwhelmed with sorrows, and none by to share them. Forget

all that. Shove my sermons into the fire. Come to me here, and let us read these letters over together by my fire, and see if we may not find some healing for you yet, some solution of this sorcery.

What would it mean to you if, by my fire, I told you of this woman now married to a man very different from me, and so far as I know happy enough with him? It somehow sets me dreaming of those days, as I lie here now thinking of you. She was brown-haired and brown-eyed. She could ride and swim, even as I, and that was a bond in itself in those days. She was of Quaker blood, but, through the death of her mother, had been educated in Paris, and for years had been the pet and boon companion of her father, a rich and cultured man. She knew the world much as I knew it, and in those days I had few friends, either men or

women, whose experience and knowledge were of that cosmopolitan kind. She was a delight to me in all these ways, as you can fancy. French was my other tongue, and yet she knew it better than I. I was bubbling over with animal spirits that knew no tiring, and her laugh and gaiety and colour kept pace with my love of games and sports. I was the browned and sturdy fellow, whom you used to know, fresh from a month or two of the spring rowing at Cambridge. I had been on to New York with others, to attend a farewell dinner to a friend who was sailing for Europe and thence to India. We had the rather boisterous dinner that fellows of from twenty to thirty enjoy. I came back alone on the express-train. Going from one car to another, a lurch of the train threw me off the platform, and only because I caught my

right arm through the iron railing, and held on and finally pulled myself back, was I saved from a bad mangling on the roadside, if not from something worse. Several of the passengers rushed to the door, and I was for a little the centre of observation when I got back into my chair. I kept seeing a pair of brown eyes peeping over a magazine, and those eyes were soft and interested, and, as I thought, even sympathetic. At any rate, if she could read anything at all, she must have read a very great interest in mine. I had never seen her before, but I meditated finding out who was to meet her in Boston, and then, — why then!

Before we reached Boston, the porter brought her a bunch of roses that he had been keeping fresh for her during the journey. As she left the car, I was close behind

her. I blush here in my bed to think of my impudence! I whispered something about a rose. Not a word from her, nor a turn of the head. She was met on the platform by a gentleman who greeted her with the warmth of a relative, but surely not her husband. I followed along the platform, and, as we neared the end of it, I saw something drop, stepped forward quickly to pick it up — and it was a rose! They entered a carriage and were driven rapidly away. I did not know him, I did not know her, and I went out to Cambridge to find my room and my goods and chattels looking rather drearier and dingier than usual. When the term closed, I was invited to spend a few days at a small town not far from Newport. I was strolling up and down the platform, having a last puff before the train went, when I heard a voice

say: "Yes, I am sure it is; that's he there!" I looked about me to see who this mortal might be, and saw no one near. Then I looked for the voice, and there at an open window were the brown eyes and the brown hair; and the brown eyes looked very friendly, and I doffed my bonnet to the lady of the rose, and she smiled back a greeting. When the train started, I made my way to that car, and her friend, evidently warned beforehand, moved to another seat, and I took her place. I began with apologies, begged that before anything I might make myself known to her. It is a convenient thing, I found then, to have a father whose name is known in the place of his habitation, and the lady knew of me very soon, though we were then together for the first time. We got on together, just as our eyes had prophesied, and I was asked to

call at her sister's house in Newport, where she was to spend the summer. The small town I went to seemed dull enough, for I was itching to get to her. I remember writing that I should be, on a certain day, at Hartmann's — if I remember the name. We were breakfasting, a friend and I, when a girl on horseback, with a groom behind her, stopped right under our window. I was soon handed a note, naming an hour to call. I remember the note — blue paper, nicely written in a firm, even hand. How few people can write notes or letters nowadays. It is shocking to see the handwriting, to see the English, the punctuation, the ignorance of even elementary things, in the notes of men and women who are of a status in society and with opportunities to know better.

It is needless to tell how I posted to

that house. That was the beginning. It was a gem of a little visit, with a walk in the rose-garden, an introduction to the father and the married sister, an invitation to come soon again, and a warm, firm handshake that lingered at the end. I was there often after that, and common interests and youth and very unusual quickness of mind on her part, and an education unlike that of any other girl I had known, and much beauty of face and figure soon slaughtered my peace of mind.

The next winter she went abroad with her father, who always went to warmer climes at that season, and we exchanged letters and books, and — again I blush — I used to send her my verses to read! Those were days when I lived alone. I was poor, my degree and my future were important, and I devoured books and really

worked. Ten hours a day with my books is not an exaggeration. I flooded my brown-eyed correspondent with book-lore, with my dreams, with a new poem, say once a week, and she in turn teased, criticised, encouraged, and, as I thought, was learning to find me indispensable, as I hesitated not to admit to myself she was to me. Ah, those were wholesome days. All I know, I learned then. Greek, Latin, French, German, Hebrew, Aramaic, a little Italian, science, art, history, literature, biography, anything was interesting to me then if I did not know it. How much there was I did not know; how much there is I do not know! And what a hodge-podge of learning I stored away. Yes, —

“A man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the goddess constant and glad.”

The days seemed long then sometimes. How short they get as we grow older! It seemed a long time before she was to return to America, and each day was a link in the chain of my longing, and seemed unduly slow in getting out of sight over the sun. But they do get by somehow, and with spring came the lady. She always comes with spring; not so? Again I saw much of her, more than ever, in fact, and it seems to me now, as I look back upon it, that her relatives treated me in some sort as *un fait accompli*. The next winter she stayed alternately with a sister in Boston and a sister in Baltimore, and I cannot say that it was good for my peace of mind. Just what I was looking forward to, what I expected, what I hoped about her, I do not know now. I was young; I had more than youth's usual amount of confidence

and carelessness. The world was made for me, and of course what I found in the world that suited me and that I needed, I was to take — the world intended that I should. My father was a poor man, but he had always known everybody, been everywhere, entertained all the lights of his own and kindred professions, and I suppose I had a notion that as men needed money, money would come. I am strictly truthful in saying that no youngster ever lived who was less mercenary than I. Money meant nothing to me then; it means very little to me now. I never measured anything or thought of measuring anything by any scale of dollars and cents.

I suppose a man's blood counts for something, and I came of a long line of Southerners, who have been soldiers and sailors and loafers and professional men, but, so far as

we can get back, say to the end of the seventeenth century, not a shopkeeper amongst them, more's the pity! We have had land and niggers, and a jovial indifference to consequences. We have raised peaches and strawberries and mortgages, and probably rows, without end, on our own property, and some hundreds of acres of it, as you know, I still have in the same undistinguished but unmercenaried name. This woman was part of my life then, and that was about all I thought about the matter. When you are just getting into your profession, and owe a year's small salary in advance, and have a taste for sending flowers and buying books, and a way of going here and there on small journeys, with nothing but a smiling and serene trust in Providence in the way of a bank-account, the marriage part of the programme and house

rent and the rest seem no part of the dream. However, one evening I was invited to the house in Boston. I remember the room where I was received. She was sitting reading beneath a tall lamp. I remember the shimmering look of the masses of her hair; I remember, as she rose and came toward me with both hands outstretched, that I thought she was clothed in clinging amber-coloured light. We were left alone for some two hours. My profession, which to me then was a sort of half-quixotic, half-enthusiastic rejoicing in my rapidly developing powers, was discussed. There was some little half-hidden hinting that I might change my calling, which as I now recall it, I paid little heed to and brushed aside as of small consequence. I merely loved her then as before, selfishly. I thought nothing of what she might be

wishing for or planning for. I fear I did little of taking the world into my confidence in those days, when my easy creed was, that the world belongs to those who take it for granted. That I loved her, she knew, but I did not take her into my confidence, tell her of my plans, ask her if what I was doing and proposing to do pleased her. Mind you, this was a woman of many suitors, and I saw them about the house in Boston, in Newport, in Baltimore; a woman, too, of wit and beauty and wealth and much worldly experience for one of her years. How I should have thought myself so all-sufficient then, it is impossible for me to understand now. The other suitors troubled me no more than had they been pet dogs; her wealth and beauty and charm of manner seemed to me what I wanted, and there I stopped. Perhaps God has punished me

in the only way that could have delivered me from that unconscious pride in my own powers, by crippling me, stripping me of opportunity, making me weak, humbling me into the very dust of impotence.

But I have not done. It seemed to me that after that evening she was less and less interested in me and my doings. I did not know why, — so blinded may a man be to his own faults. I would not ask, she did not volunteer to tell. Finally it flashed across me that I was poor, that perhaps she feared the long struggle before success came, that her bringing up and surroundings made my profession distasteful to her. Little things flocked into memory. A word here, a criticism there, a mocking speech at this or that feature of my professional duties, a statement to the effect that she had heard a classmate of a clerical friend of mine, who

was a hero to me in those days, say that the said friend was a snob; these and a half a hundred things came to the aid of my suspicion. So this is the truth, this is the real state of the case, I said to myself, then so let it be. I became half-hearted. I wrote little, I sent no flowers, no books, no verses, I proposed no rides. We were both miserable; certainly I was miserable and lonely to the very hilt. After weeks of this, I was formally invited again to call. What a dreary day it was in the early spring in Boston. There was winter in every breath of air. The dirt and disorder of winter, packing up to go, were everywhere. It seemed to me Boston had never been so unkempt, so haggish-looking, as though the town itself were a ragged, careless, elderly slattern.

It was afternoon, the lights had not been

brought into the room, and there was a sort of musty twilight effect. She had been crying. She looked older, her hair did not seem so fresh and alive, and her eyes were dull, and I was cold, and my feet felt wet, and there was no comfort in my clothes. We shook hands, and I noticed a small hardwood chest on a table near her. She took a key and unlocked it. There was a dried-up rose that had been red, on top! Then my letters in neat packages. She handed them to me and asked if I would mind returning hers. I said she was welcome to hers, but that I did not want those on the table. A servant came in with a lamp, and then another, and then another, and when she went out leaving the room all bright, my lady went from one to another putting them out. I fingered over the letters; she cried. I seemed to become more

and more physically uncomfortable, something unknown to me in those days. I felt that my feet were damp and chilled, that my nose was cold, that my hands were clammy. My brain was not heated nor excited, but seemed numb. I was saying good-bye, and giving up things I wanted, and being torn inside out, and I was a clod-hopper. I could not explain myself to myself or to her. Her face had become unattractive with its tears, her supple, strong hand, that I had often admired, was mouldy to the touch. She was no longer agreeable to me physically even, and I was as death in my own eyes. I hung on with a maudlin feeling that the fire would blaze forth of itself, that the lamps would relight themselves, that the room would get warm, that I would become alive again, that she would smile and drown me in her loveliness, as she

had done so often before. But the atmosphere changed not, she changed not, I changed not. I became colder and colder and more and more dumb, and finally, I kissed her hand and stumbled out of the room and out of the house and back to Cambridge, and I slept on the floor in my clothes in front of my fire that night. I think that was the first time that my nerves, and my nerve, were shattered. I have never seen that woman since that afternoon, that miserable afternoon.

I loved her then as much as ever I did, but my heart locked itself up, that awful inheritance of impassiveness, of outward coldness and pride got the best of me, and I lost the only sweet thing I ever had in my life. You know my life since then, though you never knew that part of it, and no one else ever knew it till

now. I pulled myself together and went on. I conquered the small world of my own profession. I often wondered if she was in front of me here or there where I spoke, if she saw my name in the papers, if she ever understood, if she really loved me as I loved her. Strange that in so small a world I never saw her again even by accident. Once or twice I met one or another of her relatives, and then I heard that she had married some man in New York. He was rich, I heard, and lived among men and women whose interests were worlds apart from mine. I do not know his name or hers. I do not know where they are, or what they are, or what they do, or whether there are children. I only know what I have told you. No woman has been a temptation to me since then. I have been worked like a pack-horse by my own success. My hours

have been long, my engagements many, my holidays none. I was getting along at a fine pace professionally, when my energy, my nerves, my ambition, and my back, were all broken in a moment, and here I am.

I am amazingly interested in you now. I am of no interest to myself or anybody else, unless it be to you, these days. I would save you from my miseries if I could. I would atone for my selfishness in the past, for my self-centredness, by giving what I have left of life to bring peace and perchance happiness to another. I thank you for the confidence that bade you send me copies of those letters. So much advice is wasted in this world because so often the confessor is only told half the story, only knows half the problem. If my poor little story of the sadness of my life strengthens the bond between us, makes you know something of the

genuineness of my sympathy, the telling of it will not have been in vain. Then, too, I would not have you think that I would not repose the same confidence in you that you have reposed in me. What there is of me I offer to solace your grief, and, if possible, to comfort you as you walk amidst the ruins through which I have walked these years past. But best of all, if it could happen that you should see some better way, and slough off all this, and come out of it a better and a stronger, and withal a kindlier man, then verily I should feel almost as though I were living on in you.

I am, my dear Douglas, how well you must know it now,

Affectionately yours,

PERCY DASHIEL.

TWENTIETH LETTER

DEAR PERCY: —

Bless you for the best man God ever made. For you to search in the past for a story that reflects no credit on yourself, so as to make me feel less lonely, is to show a friendship of which a woman could not conceive. Imagine a woman throwing mud at herself in order to make an erring woman-friend feel less isolated. Have you never noticed how a reference to a woman's friendship for a woman, brings to the face of a man a sad smile? He knows, whether analyst or not, that in its best sense no such thing exists. A woman judges a man with allowances. She never makes any for her own sex. The fact that she has resisted a

temptation, before which another woman has fallen, hardens her heart for all time. No woman ever took a bird's-eye view of another woman's life; her mental stand is too close to everything she studies. For her a fly-speck on a big canvas would spoil the picture, and so a woman's judgment of another is valueless, and the least clever of men intuitively knows this. In her affection for one of her sex, the spirit of good-fellowship is lacking. The live and let live theory, the capacity to forget and forgive right royally, is altogether wanting, and what remains is the feeling that if she is not as I am, she is not as she should be. Her greatest happiness is to forgive a man and condemn a woman. A woman will live with a drunken and brutal husband until his death, will hide his and her shame during life, and sanctify his memory afterward.

when she would not forgive her sister for the slightest step aside from the path she trod herself. Is it that because, where a man is concerned, there is always a possibility of ownership, or ownership itself, that could never exist with others of her own age and sex, that makes her forgiving on the ground that, what is mine is best? — I wonder.

I cannot imagine that you have been all these years alone with an unspeakable grief, you, with your helping hand, your infinite tenderness and smiling encouragement for others. Oh, the pity of it!

One's first impression of the earth is that it is large, mountains seem high, rivers seem broad, — it is a mistake. The earth in the universe is less than a pin-point, and on its surface is but one big thing, and that is mankind's capacity for suffering. You

cannot overrate suffering, it is limitless. In days gone by the law limited the sum possible to be recovered by survivors for the loss of a member of the family to five thousand dollars. You might lose both eyes and recover fifty thousand dollars. There was a limit to death in the eye of the law, but none to suffering.

Your letter has accomplished that which you intended. I am less lonely. As you know there is no room in my heart for aught but love of her, but to it is attached a pendant of unspeakable value—your friendship. You are indeed made in the image of God. Thank you this time for no word of condemnation. There is too much condemnatory criticism in the world and too little praise. With us criticism is always censure. There are more men who can be encouraged by a word of appreciation than

can be driven to greater effort by a curse. I am so glad that you approve of my having told you the whole story and left nothing in reserve. An *expressio falsi* is bad, a *suppresio veri* is worse, but a half truth is the worst of all. The intention to deceive is so apparent.

As for me, I have been broken on the wheel of passion. It does seem sometimes as if the Lord's punishments were in excess of the crime. Has my life of rectitude in the past no favour in His eyes? How many virtues does it take to equal one fault, and how many people have asked themselves this same question? One's debit and credit account never seem to balance, the book-keeping in heaven is complicated. All I know is that the breech-block at the base of my brain is loosened, the rivets of my whole moral nature rattle and I long for peace.

The love of peace may be an acquired taste, for some of the natural-born fighters of the world, but it is easily acquired; all you need is the commonest of things, just trouble all your life. I get no rest, for I seem to be in a state of vibration as the result of a great shock; indeed, this is a world of unrest. I believe even inanimate things suffer from vibration, — a rock is jarred by the heating of the earth's heart, ah! but how a great boulder fills you with respect! — something to which a thousand years is as a split second. Do not mind if my letter seems disjointed. I am writing more for my sake than for yours. I must be disjointed, for mentally I have fallen apart. This will rectify itself in time, I suppose, so I will not add to your worries. The acme of all selfishness is to add to a real trouble an imaginary or ephemeral grievance. I was

talking to a man to-day, and I knew by something he said he expected me to laugh. I did so. You watch an infant — it smiles — you say to yourself, Ah, but the angels who can talk the only language it can understand are great wits! But the nurse says no. What you think is a smile, is caused by colic. That is the way I smiled to him, for I have colic of the heart. After all, life is a diminuendo of laughs. I used to laugh a great deal, but if I tried now, I would feel as foolish as a man who ventured to sing without a voice.

So you see I cannot laugh, I cannot care, and am as useless to myself and others as a goldfish in a bowl, — and to think I once was happy. When next I'm happy, God give me sense to realise it at the time.

It may interest you to know I am drinking a little bit again, not in a way that would

disgust you, but simply the furnace in me that generates vitality needs more fuel. A man can set brandy afire and so can brandy a man. Honours are easy between them. If I continue, however, my constitution will go, and I shall have to live on my by-laws, as Choate said. By the way, alcohol reminds me of a French courier: he permits no one else to rob you, so he may rob you himself. A drinking man always dies of drink. However, whether in athletics or alcohol, it is the ounce more or less that counts, and I am avoiding the ounce more.

Percy, why did she dismiss me? Riddle me that. Was it caprice?

“Ladies, ladies, when you fly,
The men they will pursue,
But if you pity when they sigh,
Alas! they'll fly from you.”

I cannot believe it; she is not the sort of woman that would let go a rock to grasp

a cloud. As for longing to be able to look her husband straight in the eye again, what nonsense! a woman can do that better when she is lying than at any other time. Do you know that to express the words "flattery" and "treachery" the Chinese employ in their writing the character meaning "woman?" Permit me to add that the Chinese are old enough as a nation to make their knowledge of human nature unquestionable. This is only interesting because it's true, — that they do.

Again I say, riddle me this, it will require no labour. For a man to make a study of men is an effort. When he thinks of women he simply draws cheques on his memory. If only as a priest, you must have had phenomenal opportunities to learn the intricacies of a woman's mind. Let the priest come out of his confessional and tell me

what he knows. What is a breach of confidence but a breach of good manners after all? I have been a fool and you tell me you have been also. I have sinned; come, sin yourself. You have proved your friendship so far, but if a thing's worth doing, it is worth doing well. You won't miss your heaven, never fear. I believe when we all get in heaven, we'll turn around and say: "Scissors! if we had known getting here was so easy we would have had a better time on the world below."

Of course, I am living at home now, which does not make things, under the circumstances, any easier. On my arrival, after my wife had used my mouth as a door-mat on which to wipe her lips, she asked me if I had had a "nice time." I nearly laughed aloud. It reminded me of the New England woman who, after gaz-

ing in silence at the sublimity of the Falls of Niagara, made her only comment: "Well, them's very nice falls for them as likes falls." I, forsooth, who have been a chip circling on the outer edges of a maelstrom, was asked if I had had a "nice time."

I believe tact is the capacity to think ahead — before you speak and before you act. Mrs. Dayton usually reverses this process. However, I have tried to be as considerate as I knew how, but Percy, more men's brains have been worn threadbare by trying to please a woman than ever were by vice. If she were not so aggressively good, if she would only make a dent in her moral nature, she would be more possible. Even for her goodness I cannot give her due credit, for she has never been tempted. The difference between a good man and a good woman is, that the man is only good when

temptations have ceased to be such and the woman only when no temptations come her way. She is now making a strenuous study of Wagner's music and Christian Science. How those two thoughts can go to bed in the same brain, is beyond me to understand. I never met any one who so much wanted to be what God never intended she should be. We simply cannot pull together. Oxen, when they have a heavy load to draw, often lean against one another, so focussing their power; it is wise — but they are not married.

My life here, well, you can guess better than I can tell you. One argument in favour of there being no hereafter, is the fact that most of us get our heaven or hell in this world, so another place simply for the purpose of rewards or punishments seems such an unnecessary expense.

Tuesday, the fifteenth.

Not another line from her; do you suppose she means our separation to be really final? Suspense is my *bête noir*. If, in the world to come, one gets the punishment one dislikes the most, I shall be kept waiting for an eternity, not knowing to which place I have been assigned.

As I was writing the above my wife brought me in a note from Mrs. B. I don't think my wife has ever brought me a note before, but she selected this one as her first effort in that line. A woman's curiosity is never wasted, for it's guided by the Devil. However, no harm was done. I simply waited till she had gone before opening it, not, however, before she had asked me whether it was a circular, adding: "You know they do up circulars so nicely nowadays."

All I read was: "I shall be at home at four. Come to me." Percy, when she wrote those three words, "Come to me," she dipped her pen in music.

After a formal greeting, I asked her:

"Why did you dismiss me?"

"I don't know."

"No, but tell me the whole truth."

"I don't know, — it was an experiment."

"An experiment to see if you could do without me?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Do you know your experiment might have killed me? Suicide was perilously near my thoughts; did you never think of the possible results of your test?"

"When a woman is deciding for herself, she never thinks of others."

"Practically you took time and opportunity to vivisection your heart in order to

weigh the amount of your feeling for me, to gauge its density and make sure of its ductile strength."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And what decision have you reached?"

"None."

"Then why did you recall me?"

"I cannot tell, just to see" —

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "just to see if your feeling for me rose like mercury from heat, — the heat engendered by propinquity. How interesting, how impersonal! You should, if you propose to call yourself a Christian, give up vivisection and wait until your subjects are dead before you begin to dissect."

"I was not vivisecting you, but myself."

"Oh, I quite understand! But, as usual, you were the operator, but I felt the pain."

"It's hard pleasing men. It seems when

you do what you, against your better judgment, think will give them the greatest pleasure, it is the way you have done it that seems to give them more annoyance than you ever hoped they would feel delight. Women, being intelligent, look at results, men always accept a result and then analyse the means by which it was reached. The platitude that men are dense is true. Men have often forgotten to enjoy the exclusive happiness of their election while they scanned the 'returns.' ”

As she talked, she smiled and plumed her hands as they lay like bits of sculpture in her lap.

“ Did you never give me a thought during all that time? ” I inquired.

“ No,” she answered, smilingly. “ If one starts to think of oneself, one has very little time to think of others.”

“ But you knew I loved you, and to be left lamenting — ”

“ I realised the fact that ‘ Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them — but not for love.’ There again, you see, results seemed to me of more importance than the patient’s temporary pains. There is such a thing as absent treatment, so there may be an absent operation. I was giving you one and ” (she laughed) “ I find you vastly improved. Some decisions are quite as painful as incisions, and I thought mine would give you happiness.”

“ And may I ask what your decision may be? ”

“ Certainly not, for I have not decided.”

“ But you have just said,” I began.

“ How many poor, tired women have heard those words, ‘ But you have just said.’ Women are not human exponents of geo-

metrical progression. Because you can say to yourself in regard to any problem, two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and all the rest, it does not follow a woman can. She loves to think that six and eleven make twenty, and the joke of it is that with her they generally do. After a man's master-mind has told him what a thing should be, a woman's illogical quickness tells her what it is. Do smile," she continued. "Do smile, or I shall cry; there is only a twist of the face between a smile and a tear."

"I cannot understand your mood," I murmured.

"Why try? I thought you were too clever; the language of a woman's heart is not a dead language, for it never existed. I thought you knew that."

"Do you intend everything to be as it has been? "

“I don’t intend anything. I only know it was necessary for me to see your face, and I sent for you. Be satisfied and rejoice that you are here. If a man only knew when not to press a woman to a decision, the decision she arrived at would probably be in his favour.”

The advice was good, and I was silent—silent so long that I won her back. I can write no more.

God be merciful to me, a happy sinner.

Wednesday, the twenty-third.

In the continuation of this, my letter, I shall make no effort to analyse my feelings; it would be impossible. I shall simply state the facts as they occurred.

I went to Tuxedo for Sunday, having made the engagement in advance of our reunion. Whom should I meet on the train

returning Monday morning but B.? He came into the smoking compartment where I sat alone, and chatted with me uninterruptedly to Jersey City. What I said is unimportant. Some of the things he said I shall try to repeat to you:—

“Children are perhaps worth while saving; it’s a gamble,—there is a glimmer of light in every one’s life, man or woman, and I hate to think they may miss it. But most men and women have had their glimmer and had not sense enough to know it at the time. That was my case, but it was not my wife, as you may probably conjecture. It was a girl in her ’teens who found me malleable iron and left me corrugated steel, set in wrinkles for all time.” There he laughed at the recollection, and speaking of luck, added: “Some men are struck with shafts of light and some with poisoned

arrows. The really great man bows to his God, if he has one, and the other bows to Fate. The only thing worth doing well is to live this life gracefully, and in this I have signally failed. You will smile when I tell you that when I was young I set my standards too high. I broke my toe-nails and my finger-nails trying to get to the top landing, without thought of the intermediate steps. When I knew it was futile, I sat down on a step very near the bottom and rocked myself with laughter. I remembered Queen Elizabeth's couplet:—

“ ‘ If thy heart fail thee,
Climb not at all.’

“ It was the girl in her 'teens who did this; she left me with no love except for myself—and ambition's only permanent prod is a love for others. I tell you this because you love my wife and I don't.

A man who cannot look a fact in the face, should not brag that he can look a man in the face. There are more males afraid of a little fact than of a big man. I am not one of those. It is not your fault that you love my wife, nor hers that she thinks she loves you, nor mine that I love neither. It is simply a little fact that I accept. Of course, having a high regard for the conventionalities, if I thought you had done me a dishonour, I might resent it. Many women whom others think guilty, I think innocent, because the marvellous thing about love is the infinite delicacy of all that leads up to it, and the infinite indelicacy of its final expression. The saving grace of decency has kept many a woman in the straight path. You doubtless wonder how I can talk this way; it is only because facts, not sentiments, interest me. A fact is a truth, and both are

always undressed. I have a naked mind; everything in the way of clothing has been torn from it. Perhaps I bore you. Will you have a smoke?" And here he offered me the cigarette-case he had with him the day of the fire. Then he continued: "What I dislike about you — and there are many things I like — is that you are a hypocrite and won't acknowledge it to yourself. You belong to that class of men who do not enjoy being called hypocrites, but who, in public, daily condemn in others what they do themselves in private. To parody, — more men have 'done bad by stealth and blushed to find it shame' than would answer the description of Pope's flattering line. Let me show you your conventional sense of honour; let me show you what it amounts to — if you can learn to hate the husband as much as you love the wife, you

are absolved in the eyes of your confrères. Is it not so? 'For Dayton is (then) an honourable man. So are they all, all honourable men.' I have some sympathy for criminals, but none for hypocrites. God makes criminals, but hypocrites make themselves. The only code of honour is the one that is all truth; the conventional code is a soothing poultice to wicked inclinations. However, I should not criticise you, for normal people should confine their criticisms to normal people—normals are in the minority, remember that, and remember that I am one. Be kind to children, and let the rest of the world be kind to itself."

This is all that I can recall of his conversation, and it leaves me no nearer to the solution of this man's character than I was before. When we reached the ferry-boat, we walked to the forward end of the men's

side and smoked. B. was unaccountably silent as we leaned over the rail, after having been so loquacious, and he kept looking back over my shoulder. At last he touched me and said: "Look there; see that drunken mother holding her baby over the railing. When she first did so, her arms were around its waist, then around its buttocks, and now around its ankles. In a moment more I shall take that child from her. By God!" he cried, "too late!" I turned just in time to see the little one drop like a plummet into the water. In an instant B. was standing on the railing, and had dived into the river's brown depths. Could he clear the wheel was the question.

Some called to the captain: "Child overboard! Stop her! Back her!" while I with others ran aft. No sign of baby—no sign of man. A moment more and I saw

a tinge of red amid the brown, and a head appeared, from which blood flowed freely, but in B.'s upraised arms, as he floated, he held the baby unharmed. We had stopped and backed, but a tug was too quick for us, and B. and the child were on its deck before we reached the spot. The tug steamed up to us, and the little one was handed to its now sobered mother. I leaped aboard the tug, and bade the captain put on all steam and go to the foot of 26th Street. B. lay on the after-deck, and from a wound in his head the blood came freely.

He smiled as I came toward him, and said, with a low, exultant note in his voice: "Dayton, I don't care a damn if I die. I have been some good in the world at last. I have saved the life of a child, not a woman's nor a man's, but a child's."

What to do, I did not know. I sat down

on the deck and took his head in my lap, holding the wound firmly closed with a piece of ice in the hollow of my hand. He was silent, but constantly smiled, as one does when one hears good news. When we got to the dock at 26th Street, a good-natured Irish policeman rang for an ambulance. He looked at the quiet form and the closed eyes of B., and said: "Poor fellow, he'll not live, sure his head's broke."

"You lie," said B., opening his eyes. "Go bang some poor child on the head with your club, and don't stand maundering there."

But I could not smile; the policeman's prophecy had startled me, and a thousand thoughts raced through my brain. Was it possible that what I had supposed was a scalp wound was a fractured skull? What if he died — what then?

The ambulance came, and an untidy youngster with an imperious manner, but without dignity, looked him over carelessly, and then remarked in a chipper way: "No drunk here; he's a case for the hospital. Dump him in." I asked permission to sit by his side, which was gracelessly granted. All through the drive to the hospital, B. lay silent and with closed eyes, but gone was the old smile of his contemptuous self I knew so well, and in its place something much pleasanter to look upon. On arrival, the doctor there made a careful examination, and, turning to me, having heard my story, said: "He got a glancing blow from the paddle-wheel, but enough to produce a fracture. We'll perform an operation as soon as possible, but, in the meantime, if he has any family, send for them, as I cannot tell what will happen."

I sat down and wrote to Mrs. B., and told her plainly the facts, adding that I would await her arrival. It was late in the afternoon before she came. She had been shopping and at a luncheon, and could not be found. She came in at last, her face aflame. It was like her to look red when another woman would have looked white. Perhaps it was because the blood had left her heart for her face. The operation had been performed, and he was conscious but languid. "Where is he?" she asked. I pointed. What passed between them, I do not know, nor naturally do I expect to ever. In about fifteen minutes, she came to the door and said: "He wants to speak to you." I went in and stood at the foot of the bed, she at his side. Percy, can you imagine the position we were in?

Looking at me with the same old wicked

smile, he haltingly said: "Dayton, I'm off on the 'out trail'; I know it. Now is your chance, old chap; sorry you're married, but that has never complicated matters for you." And his blue lips parted in a grin. He looked at her for a moment, and, sighing, turned his face to the wall. A moment later he shivered, raised his arm and let it fall. I ran for the doctor. He went to the foot of the bed close to the wall and looked in his face. "Take her away; he's gone. You can bring her back in a little while," he said. I beckoned to Mrs. B., and like a submissive child she followed. We sat and waited silently in an anteroom. What do people think of in such moments?—nothing. For once the brain is blank, and simply ticks in unison with the clock on the mantel. The doctor motioned for us to return. We went in, and there lay B.,

looking as he might have looked when he knew the "girl in her 'teens," but can you conceive it, Percy? they had propped his chin up with a book, on the face of which in gold were printed the words: "The Holy Bible," the book he had ignored all his life, and only remembered in the act of his death. Any book for such a purpose would have made him look ghastly. Mrs. B. sprang forward and snatched the book away. Slowly his jaw fell open, as if he were about to speak. She gave one piercing shriek, and, dashing the Bible to the floor, rushed from the room. The doctor's only comment was: "Hell! these women, what do they expect?"

It was an hour before she became quiet enough for me to send her home in her carriage. I stayed and made the necessary arrangements.

What more is there for me to tell you? — a big funeral, crowded with people suffering from curiosity, not grief. He lies in Greenwood. I say to myself, “Judge not that ye be not judged,” but perhaps you, O blessed of God, may dare to tell me what you think.

Three days after the funeral, I received a letter from Mrs. B. This is all she said: “I do not care to see you again in a long while. I am going away. I leave you no address. Should I ever want you, I will send. Please regard my wishes.” I shall do so. I need time for thought, and so does she.

Write to me, Percy, and loosen the bands about my head and heart. Yours,

DOUGLAS.

TWENTY - FIRST LETTER

West Braintree, Mass.

MY DEAR DOUGLAS: —

We are back again in the country. When the days are warm, my window is opened and I am bundled up, and my chair is pushed over that I may have a breath of the golden air. How little we take account of the staple things of life until they become precious to us by their rarity or their unattainableness. I never used to think of being grateful for sun-warmed air. It seemed to be mine by right, as though having lungs, I had been given a draft payable at sight on the best nature had. Now so small a matter as an open window with the sun pouring in gives me keen delight.

Bob parades his whole stable under the window where I can see the beasts, and after luncheon he sits here awhile, and we go over the points of "Bess" and "Billy" and "Mima" and "Duchess" and all the rest of them. Bob can talk horse from Xenophon down to the last distinguished polo player, and for a lame parson I know my share about the Grand National, the Suburban, and the next coaching season. Bob always thinks the best horse is going to win, that the next season's coach is to be better horsed than ever before, that his last lot of horses — six new ones this spring — are far and away better than any he has ever had before, and that errors, accidents, failures, and sins in life are excrescences that should be excused if possible, and if not, then left unnoticed. He is a sort of wholesome "Praise ye the Lord," and I am not

sure that his unseeing, uncritical optimism, which tosses a halo to every living creature that asks for one, is not a fine thing. I get cantankerous at times, and let go a shaft here and there at the world, but Bob looks so grieved, and so totally unbelieving that he turns my twisted spirits back and lulls my temper to repose. He is so confident that what he loves can do no wrong, that Katharine and the children, and the horses, and the dogs, and the servants, all live in his cheery hopefulness, and things go right apparently because this happy, confident, undefeated personality creates an atmosphere in which the germs of failure, and insubordination, and discontent cannot live.

I wish you would run up here for a fortnight. Bob would be glad to see you again, and I more than glad, though I sometimes think that my old friends would be shocked

to see me as I am now, and perhaps be made unhappy. But you must not think of that, and when I have a good book I am about as well again as ever. Your letters, too, and the renewal of our friendship has been a great solace to me, and, if I have been of any help to you through all this unfortunate business, I am proud, even though the parish is only of one.

You give me too much credit for my confession. I thought it might help you to know that another man whom you respected and liked had made a grievous ass of himself, and perhaps been cruel through pride and selfishness. When your chances to retrieve mistakes are gone, as are mine, you regret them the more. Both Bob and Katharine knew the girl of whom I wrote you, but she seems to have passed out of their life, at least I have never heard her

mentioned, and if they know of her now it can only be in a casual way. I think you are wrong in some of your slaps at the clergy. When I knew more of them, I used to feel that the trouble lay not in their knowing too little of worldly things, but in their knowing and caring too little of spiritual things. In the case of the clergy, my experience has been that innocent ignorance is a better spiritual tonic than sophisticated intelligence. The sensational preacher, discussing every newspaper head-line; the organising parson, with a parish built up on the lines of a business corporation; the fashionable clerical athlete, swinging down the street with a cigar in his mouth; the worldly cleric, intimate with all the fashionable ladies, conspicuous at horse-shows and the opera, or the disappointed and discouraged minister, who

discovers himself to be unfitted for his task, and yet lacking the courage to throw off the irksome and unloved yoke, and who dares not face the world as a man — and there are many more of these last than you suspect — none of these is what I want at my death-bed, nor for my confessor, nor for an example to my boy, if I had one. “Monsieur the Curé, with his kind, old face,” is more to my taste. The world is looking not for a saviour who knows it, but for a saviour who loves it! So I think, at least, though it does not look that way now. And perhaps I am so far behind in the race these days, and my views so antiquated, that I am not a fair judge. When I wrote you of what a fool I had been, and perhaps how wicked I had been, I wanted you to know that another could suffer with you sympathetically, and that whatever came of it all,

I, at least, would try to understand and to help. I know, too, that a man may lose control of himself, not see straight, not think clear, when his nerves have been battered, and his emotions kept at the boiling point too long, and I thought my slight tale of the past might help to steady you.

I was pencilling away with a pad on my lap, when your last letter was brought in to me. I had so hoped that the last parting was the end, that you would recover in time, that you might perhaps come here for a little visit, and now what dreadful things have happened!

The Boston papers have so little outside news; then, too, I rarely read about accidents and the gruesome things of life these days. When my eye catches such a headline, I turn away to something else.

I saw some notice of the fire in Washington, but there were no names mentioned in our despatches. Of this last terrible tragedy I had seen nothing until your letter came.

Poor fellow, I cannot help feeling sorry for him. What turns a man so cynical, and yet lets live in him a spark of heroism and sacrifice such as flamed up in this man when he leaped into the water for a child?

I saw a man caught in a paddle-wheel once, years ago, and when he was rescued he was unrecognisable.

What horrible hours for you those must have been, and the poor wife!

Is it possible that two people live together, a man and a woman, getting harder and harder, bitter and more bitter against one another, like two acids that mingled make a poison, while, if they had been

mated differently, both might have developed into something good? Did this man and this woman grow to feel that each had something that neither God nor man could make sweet if they were kept together? What you write of them reads to me like that.

The woman cannot be vile and hard and selfish, else you could not love her; the man has proved, even to you, that he had a soft heart on occasion, and that he was no coward. Now a man who is not a coward, and loves little children, is not, cannot be, irretrievably damned. He will find his heaven now, where a subtler Judge than either you or I sits in judgment. And she has gone away, too. Let her go in peace!

Those flippant and cynical remarks of the man now dead may have been just the expression of his anguish. He had failed

to love, or to win love — why, you and I do not know even now, and this side of heaven it is unlikely any one will know. There may have been no grave fault on either side, only the lack of that elasticity of the spiritual muscles which made all their caresses blows, and made them hurt one another whenever they came together. I do not pretend to know men very well, much less women, and yet I have seen men and women like that.

But I do respect this woman for bidding you to leave her just now. I see no puzzle there. I can conceive it to be true that a character with anything honourable left would prefer rather to deceive the living than the dead. I believe if I were underground, you would be far more loath to do what you knew would hurt my affection for you than you are now when I am alive —

though I be only half alive. There is a defencelessness about the dead which appeals at once even to the unchivalrous. You must be feeling that yourself.

May I not speak to you now of your own wife? It is hard to live in an atmosphere of misunderstanding. This is a common phrase, much laughed at by the man in the street when he reads it in the newspaper reports of domestic scandals. And I suppose a really good man would not remain forever misunderstood. Nevertheless, to the frail ones like you and me, to live with those who have different ideals, different aims, and who have no appreciation whatever of our strivings for better things, and who only see and mock at our failures, is no easy matter. I know all that, my poor boy. May I say that I know how you are fretted, and how you must fume and wear

out heart, and nerves, and brain, and waste yourself in worry? Wagner and Christian Science must make a bad pair of wheelers for the domestic coach, especially with such an one as you as near side leader. But there are worse things even than that. At least Christian Science may persuade the lady that she is happy if she thinks so, and certainly Wagner must persuade her that she knows nothing, and thus make her humble. Like poor Douglas Jerrold, who, after reading a few pages of Browning, was seen to thrust the book away from him, put his hands to his head, and exclaim: "My God, I'm mad!" When she finds that she cannot understand Wagner, she may admit to herself that perhaps she has misunderstood you. If Wagner accomplishes this for you, I shall deny on personal grounds all that Nietzsche has written about him. Who can

tell what part this deifier of brass instruments may play in your household?

“Who can point as with a wand,
And say this portion of the river of my mind
Came from that fountain?”

It is hard for a man who has only known the poetry of love to talk meaningly to a man who is struggling with the prose of his. I would not write of this subject at all, did I not know how kindly you deal with my suggestions, and how, in any event, you accept what I try to give as well and truly meant for your help. You are a man with the shadow of the hangman's noose not far from you. How often I have thought of that, dreamed of that, and awakened thankful that you did not kill that man. You are a man, too, who only just missed running away with another man's wife, and having escaped so much ought you not to be thank-

ful and to beware? I am not forgetting how a man may persuade himself that not to have a certain bliss he longs for is to have nothing. But, after all, *aut Caesar aut nihil*, is one thing, and *aut Caesar's wife aut nihil*, is quite another. This age of deified strenuousness is confusing to weak minds in that it tempts men to believe that all ambitions are on the same level and all of the same sanctity. To do, to get, to have, are watchwords in a materialistic time such as ours, but it does matter *what* you do, *what* you strive for, *what* you get. The mere making the machinery go smoothly and efficiently and successfully is not all.

It seems to me as I lie here that there never was a time when so many men came near gaining the whole world at the risk of losing their own souls. You are too much the man of the world, the man-about-

town, not to know that a man's wife is his own fault, after all, though I am willing to admit that his mother-in-law may be his misfortune! As I have written you in other letters on this same subject, the world must live and must be governed by rule. "There is some one wiser than Voltaire and wiser than Napoleon; *c'est tout le monde*." If a man steal, to prison he goes. If a man kill, he is tried for his life. If a man breaks up another man's home, the world breaks him. Now we all know there are myriads of shades of stealing, of killing, of committing adultery, but *tout le monde* cannot bother with differences of shade and complexion. How are you to explain to *tout le monde* the infinite variety of the dulness of Mrs. Douglas Dayton?

Napoleon was a thief, and a murderer, and an adulterer, but he did these things

so magnificently that his own brother Joseph, when asked his opinion of him, said he thought him "not exactly a great man, but a good man," and *tout le monde* made the little Corsican peasant an emperor. In short, if you are to break the simple rules of *tout le monde*, you must do it magnificently, or not at all. If you are big enough, or love heroically enough, or feel yourself to be right enough, to bid *tout le monde* go hang, then — *pace* my prejudices — you may upset the conventions, but otherwise not on your life.

You have time to think now, my dear parish of one, time to cool off, time to get the blood flowing regularly again between your heart and your finger-tips, and me you always have, if I can serve you. Would that I might serve you as well as I love you!

I had been waiting to hear from you again before posting my letter to you, for I was not quite sure of your address. Much has happened here in the meantime.

Katharine came to my room one morning and asked if I would mind seeing Mrs. Billings.

“Is she a friend of yours?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Then why should I mind seeing her?”

“Well,” said Katharine, “she thought you might not care to see her after such a long interval in your acquaintance; she was Mary Sedley.”

I looked at Katharine closely, but it was evident that she knew nothing of what Mary Sedley had been to me. You know, because I have written you of her. It seems that she is a widow now, childless and unhappy, and Bob and Katharine, who ought

to be endowed, by the way, as a hospital for the unhappy, have her staying with them for a week or two in this quiet country town.

I think I never felt my physical condition so acutely as when Katharine told me that Mary Sedley wanted to see me, was near me. To display my crunched and crippled body to this woman whom I had loved, whose love I have always loved, and love now, was distressing, humiliating to me. I looked down at my long, lean, white hands with their concave nails and their dull, death-blue colour. I saw, as in a mirror, her face when she should look at me lying here. From the man who once could swing her on to his shoulder and walk off with her, to the wretched bag of bones crumpled up here, with no life left, except in his eyes, and feeble, weary movements of the arms and hands. What a

chasm for her imagination to bridge! It seemed brutal, horrible to have love come back and find a hideous caricature of what had been dear to it. I am still selfish, I fear, still hungry for the approbation that all the world longs for. It was a terror to me to think that she might come in at the door, look at me, turn away, and then force herself back to take my hand as she might take the hand of any crippled stranger. God, how I wanted to be well again, to be strong again, to be fair in her eyes again, to be stronger than she! I am past all loving now, but my whole body was parched with thirst for just a drop of the old affection, and I was frightened to think that she might come in, see me, and be indifferent. I have no right to anything else. I could not take anything else if it were offered me, and yet how for those first few moments my

hopes played music, my poor old fingers tingled, my cheeks grew warm again! and then I fear I cursed my fate and had Katharine not been there I should have sobbed in vexation. Why had she come at all? It could be no comfort to me or to her. It had merely waked me again from my hard-won resignation, started the fever of life again, tempted me again to querulousness, and all for naught.

You and I have seen the old man Death at close quarters once or twice, but we were young and I can only recall one occasion when I was frightened, really frightened, and that was when I lost my way in a snow-storm out in Nebraska shooting. I shall never forget the silence, the whole ground without a track of any kind visible, the soft, big flakes of snow making a veil all around me, and the horror of my own inaudible-

ness. I could make nothing hear or feel that cared or that could answer. Intelligence, strength, sight, hearing, all that a man counts upon in peril were nullified by the soft, smothering snow. I lost my head that time for a few moments, and I have never forgotten my feelings then.

Now on the other side of that door I felt that there was another snow-storm, soft, white, not understanding my plight, ready to bury me, lose me, forget me, in awe-struck pity. You see, I have loved too! You see what a poor philosopher I am when it comes to the healing of myself. You see what a good preacher I am to my parish and what a poor minister to my own needs. You see how that I am still vain, how I long to be looked up to and loved, how I am no more resigned to my fate than you. I could have thrown those shrivelled legs out of

the window, tossed my lean hands into the fire, plucked out this straggling beard by the roots! I only wanted to be a pair of eyes to see for a moment and then fade out and be no more. Alas! I can whine with the best of 'em, Douglas, old man. Forgive me for having prated to you of self-control, of taking your whippings like a man, and all the rest. I squirmed and protested when the lash was lifted over me. Katharine saw that there was something wrong, but probably thought I was suffering more than usual, for as a rule I am always glad to see such of their friends and mine as care to come. She knew nothing of what it meant to me to see this woman again. It was like having my old whole self brought into the room to look upon my present disjointed hulk, and to feel as a sort of third person how my past hopes and ambitions

pitied my present helplessness. I who had taken the world as though it belonged to me, I who had taken the world for granted, was to stand and look at a crippled captive whom the world passed by unnoticed. The whole situation seemed to me abominably humiliating, and yet in spite of it all I could not bring myself to forego the sight of her again. How true it is that even our dearest desires are short-sighted and improvident. What we think must be an unmixed blessing if it will only come, comes, and we find it not altogether unalloyed. If I had been told any time during this last year that she would some day sit here beside me, and let me touch her hand, and look into her eyes, and see the ripple of her hair, and have the sense again of that well-poised physique, and that nimble intelligence, I should have counted it bliss

indeed, — and now I was simply afraid to have her see me. I dared not ask Katharine to tell her that I was shockingly changed. She had probably only heard casually that I had been hurt and she must face the change unarmed and unwarned, and that made me afraid for her too. But like most people who are very confident, or who have been very confident, themselves, I gave less credit than I should have done. She came into the room with Katharine, looking more like an empress among lilies than ever, in her black things. She took my hand, and had I been deaf and blind I should have known who it was. It was the same cool, strong, light hand as of yore — a hand made for a horse's mouth, and to give a man confidence when he clasps it. She looked thin, and a little worn and tired, I thought, but her eyes had the same half-amused and half-

musings look and met mine with no more embarrassment or pity than if we had been both on horseback and I as well as she. You see how little I gave her credit for self-control.

“It is a very long time since we met, Mr. Dashiell, and so big is the world that I only heard that you had been hurt through Katharine. What a strange man you are never to have told Katharine that you even knew me!”

“Ah, but you know I used to say even to you that I was not sure I knew you, and I have never felt quite sure enough about it to tell Katharine that I did!”

She smiled, and Katharine said:

“Oh, Percy never did talk much about people, and nowadays he never does unless they are dead and have had their biographies published.”

“I don’t believe you have changed a bit!” said Mrs. Billings. What a delicate touch was that, for how terribly changed I must have looked to her! Presently Katharine went out and left us together. We talked of old times, of the horses we used to ride, of the sailing in and out of Newport harbour, of the day when we attempted to board the lightship and she fell in, and the time I had pulling her in again, over the stern of the boat, and how I made her pull ropes all the way back, to keep her warm. I laughed for the first time in months, and she made herself as gay, and bright, as though we were really romping together at Newport again. She is to stay ten days or more here, and does not wish to see any one or to have it known even that she is here. Her husband died very suddenly, Bob tells me, and even old Bob

admits that he was not a great loss. He must have been pretty bad if Bob thinks poorly of him.

I had all my pains and pangs for nothing. She came and went that first day, without so much as betraying by the flutter of her voice, or a shadow in her eyes, that she found the situation unusual. She did not so much as mention the fact that I was invalided — she did better — she made me forget it. I always said that she was a clever woman. As was my habit then, I never told her so, but I used to congratulate myself upon knowing it. She has been here a week now and I know her better than ever before. Her husband was, as I had heard before, a man of considerable wealth and of no mean attainments, and he loved her in the beginning. She has dropped into the easy habit of talking to me as do you, Doug-

las, as though I were only half alive, as though I were impersonal, and so now I have a parish of two. Her story is a sad one enough, and the misunderstanding between her and her husband one that came early and lasted to the end. In a burst of affection and confidence he told her of an incident in his past life that she thought shameful. It set her against him, and this reception of his unnecessary and intimate confession hardened and embittered him. He was eager, as some men are, to have children, to have a boy of his own, but after his confession she had no sympathy with this desire of his. They grew farther and farther apart and their lives got sharper and sharper at the edges until meeting became little less than cutting. He had ambitions, and this clouding of his life spoiled them and soured him into indif-

ference, and thus they were living when he was killed. She half intimated that he brought about the killing himself. Poor lady, poor life, poor world! There is nothing here for a jury and yet there is death for the one and a clouded life for the other. She comes here to my room every day now, and we are hours together. She knits or embroiders or reads to me, and I read to her. Despite the sadness she brings and the sadness she comes to hear, we have some very gay half-hours. We have been reading the "Life of Paul Jones," for example, and she is greatly amused at my admiration for this Beau Brocade of our naval history, and once she let fall the remark that she and her sister had always felt that I ought to have been a cavalry officer, a remark that seemed to me to contain something of the secret that was at the bottom of her misun-

derstanding and mine some years ago. Perhaps she was right then, but who cares now!

I begin to look forward to the day when she will come into the room to say good-bye, with a feeling of numbness and despair. She keeps me living. I shall shrivel up when she goes, and yet her charm, her tonic for me is as intangible as a wreath of white smoke. What a miracle is health! The dogs and children leap for joy when she comes among them, and Bob's "Jove, what hands!" after he has ridden with her, are his form of a brass monument. This easy poise of mind and body which makes the world seem easy of mastery, has a psychic power upon other living things that we cannot account for. Helpless and abnormally impressionable as I am, I see this effect she has upon all about her. What a

prop to a household she might have been! How she would have soothed and smoothed domestic concerns! I often feel, though, that such people have no right to die until those they quicken have passed beyond need of their help. What an awful blow to a household to have such a personality carried out of it dead! That would be tragedy indeed. And yet she is no goddess withal! I have a notion that she is not altogether content with her past. She blames herself evidently for some phase in her past life, and considers herself not a little to blame. I am too happy, and she apparently too peaceful just now to mention our own rough parting. If I was wrong, at least I am forgiven; and if she was at fault, she sees no reason for an explanation now. It is like religion: the more one knows of Christian evidences the less one is likely to profit by

his devotions. This materialistically scientific age to the contrary, we do not want to know about the best things. Fie upon the man who would dissect his favourite poem, analyse his child's feelings, inquire too closely into the motives of his lady-love, or employ a pair of balances in his friendships!

When a man is suffocating he just wants air, any kind of air will do. I have been suffocating and I want her: any phase of her, any part of her, any smile or touch of her will do. I have no mind to subtle examinations now, nor to left-over explanations. I am too near death to be squeamish about life. If it tastes good I am no longer to be made nervous by talk about bacilli. I leave that to youth and health and all their wastable opportunities.

She has been on the verge more than once

of telling me more about herself, but I have turned the talk aside from such matters. I live along in the sun and shade; in the sun of her presence, in the shade that she will go.

The children with a fatal precision of prophecy already call her "Auntie," as though they breathed in from the air of this room what she might have been if this were a child's world, and not a mere man's world with all its unnecessary vicissitudes. It is curious how gladly children make relatives of their friends; while we should be glad to make friends of all our relatives, or escape from some of them altogether. I spoke to one of the small nieces about calling her "Auntie," and explained that she was not their "Auntie." "Well, I wished she was!" replied the irrepressible tot.

"But perhaps Mrs. Billings does not feel as you do," said I.

“Oh, yes, I should love to be your auntie,” said she; I suppose to appease the child. And then conscious of another meaning, she steadfastly did not look at me and blushed.

But what is all this saccharine matter to you? What are you to Hecuba? I know well enough, however, that you will rejoice even in your sorrow to hear of my happiness, of my new lease of life. The situation puzzles me and worries me not a little. If I were well I should be at this woman's feet to-morrow. As it is, I am preparing for myself disappointment and loneliness that I have little courage to bear. Suppose even the impossible should happen. Suppose — ah, how glorious are these supposes! Suppose out of pity, or repentance, or through a passing notion that after the storms of her life she would like the peace

of this dull world of mine, she should consent to stay on here with me! Even then could an honest man consent to such a sacrifice? Have I the right to take her in an hour of weakness, and tie her to this bedside? She is young yet, full of life yet. There are worlds of love and experience and domestic happiness open to her, and when one has said the best that can be said, this is an atrophied existence, a dry life, that I live and must live.

I know that you would agree with this, though you will not say it. I know, too, that I would censure such action too, if I were alive, and not a mere mummy, with moving eyes, and scarcely movable limbs. And yet seeing all this and hating all this and seeing the temptation full panoplied before me, and with no excuse of impulse, or of being taken unawares, I feel that I am

such a coward, so weak, so cruelly selfish, that I might stumble and fall and end this poor rag of life of mine with the worst sin of all.

Who is without temptation? God knows I thought that, as compensation, I was spared the trials, and the tortures, of your life, and of the lives of other men, and I perhaps spoke lightly of them. I preached courage, and bade you, a sufferer, be strong, little reckoning that I could ever again be called upon to test my own magnanimity, under similar circumstances. Forgive me for all that, forgive me, and God forgive me, if I have maintained any pose of being not as other men are, when all the while my opportunity to show myself a Pharisee was preparing.

It is midnight, the noon of thought; the time when wisdom mounts her zenith with

the stars, and I am so little wise! Indeed I am so fond, and foolish, and weak, and happy! Perhaps she is praying for me, praying for my poor body, little guessing of what I am thinking. Let me turn to, and pray for my poor soul. How poor is man's spirit that even so shrivelled a body as mine can give it cause to err!

It is morning again. This soft spring weather is in a conspiracy against me. It is yielding weather. The muscles of both mind and body are more supple in this benignant warmth. She comes and goes, more beautiful, more kindly, more to my taste each day. They torture me by remarking upon her increasing colour, her freshness, her growing cheerfulness. Bob, in my presence, pressed her to stay on an-

other week, insisting that the air here agrees with her.

Is she, then, happy here with me? I ask myself. Would it be so wrong, after all, to beseech her to stay here always? Who am I that I should decide for her, that I should decide against myself, that I should plan out what another's life should be, and leave her, and leave myself, no choice? Perhaps the peace and quiet here, the very dulness of it all, are the balm she needs. Why should she want more of that life that has torn her, and misunderstood her, and mocked her with offerings of happiness that were mere puff-balls, turning to brown dust when she took them in her hands? I believe they would be glad to have her here, doubly glad, if they thought it would bring me happiness. She could still ride and romp, and give expression to her youth.

All these vagrant thoughts, these evil tramps of the mind, play hide-and-go-seek in my imagination.

It is not far off, the day when I must clench my teeth, and hide my trembling hands beneath the coverlet, and try to say good-bye without wincing. They tell me, though she has not mentioned it, that they have tried to persuade her to stay longer, but that the day after to-morrow she leaves, to go back to New York. Where is New York? A million miles away, is it not? Way off among the stars somewhere, peopled by men and women who will not understand her, or love her. How much will they see in those clear eyes? What studies will they make of the sun in her hair? What will they care that her hands are smooth and strong and gentle? What conceivable right have those careless ones

to brush against her in the street, or to turn unheeding eyes upon her as she passes, as though she were one of them?

She came in that morning looking a little solemn, despite the smile on her face. She held my hand in hers as she said "good morning," and went on from "good morning," to "good-bye."

"And I am so sorry to go! I have not spoken to you of years ago when we were such good friends, but it has all come back and made me very happy here. And you have not changed!"

"No!" I blurted out, "I have not changed — except —" my hands dropped down on the rug across my chair.

"Oh, I did not mean that! That is nothing to me! I should be as happy here in this room if you were a thousand times as ill as you are. And you are getting better,

you know. I can see the improvement every day!"

"No, no! You cannot deceive me; do not try to deceive yourself! I can never be any better, and I can only be even as I am for a little longer, perhaps a year or more, and perhaps less!"

"I will not believe it. I do not believe it. You are too good to die. They all love you so much here, and I—I cannot have you go away from us all. You have made me so much better than I was. I have improved, as they say, but I have improved in other ways, too, ways that they do not know, in ways that even you do not know, and I am so sorry to go, so sorry!"

She knelt down beside the chair, and put her arms on the arm of it, and laid her head upon them, and cried a little. I put my

poor, weak hand upon her head — how soft and smooth her hair is! — and said:

“I do not want to go away from here. I never wanted to go less than now. I do not want you to go, either, but it were wrong, cruel, selfish even, to ask you to stay here, even if you would.”

“Oh, but I would be so glad to stay, so glad, so glad!” she said. I believe I nearly lifted myself in my chair, for the first time in many, many months.

“What do you mean? What can you mean? Would you be willing to stay here with me — to live here in these rooms, with these books and nothing but me? No, no, it is not possible; it is not right. You are young and strong, full of life. You even make me stronger, livelier, when you are near. It were waste, shameful waste. You are unhappy now. This place has seemed

peaceful to you. The change has helped you, but for always, for every day, it would be different, very different. You would tire of it. You would want other distractions, other interests, and it is right and wholesome that you should want them."

"No, I shall never want more than this again. I should never tire of this dear room and you. I should not only be willing to stay, glad to stay, I should be proud to stay. But I cannot. I do not deserve it. I am not worthy of you. You believe I am only unhappy, and that my unhappiness has been the fault of another, or the result of misunderstanding. But it is not so. I will not have you, of all people, believe I am good when I am not. He had a right to despise me. I have done wrong. I have done what you could not forgive. I am a wicked, bad woman! I have no

right to come here," she said, "and shelter myself here in your goodness, in your belief in me, and to go on living in this peaceful, happy place!" And then she sat on the rug by my chair, her head in her hands, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

I could say nothing for a long time. I sat and looked at that beautiful head buried in her hands. Crouching there beside me, bowed down in this new grief that I did not understand. I could only think how lithe she was even then, how palpitating with life even then.

It was a long story she told me at last. She and her husband travelled about a good deal, restless and unhappy, striving to change the dreary fact of their discontent by giving it a new setting, by placing a new background of scenery behind it.

He became more and more dark and forbidding toward her. He was not a "tame man," as she naïvely expressed it, and his very abilities made it the easier for him to torture her with his words, and with his carefully controlled but hard manner toward her. She made no excuses for herself. She wept as she said that she often and unfairly contrasted her life with him with what she once dreamed it might be with me. This undertone of her mind was unfaithfulness in and of itself, but, as time went on, they grew fairly to hate each other.

Her moral stamina weakened under this ceaseless, remorseless hatefulness. She grew not to care either for him or for any one. Any anodyne was a comfort. Meeting other people, dancing, exercise, playing cards, flirtation, anything, to forget her life. As she expressed it, she ran about wildly,

just to make herself think that she was not cooped up inside the ring-fence of this man's tireless contempt. She was no better than he at last. She hated him, and would hurt him by her speech and manner, even as he hurt her.

I remember our college days when we spoke of a good sparring-match, or of a boat-race, as having been a "bruising battle." Their life together must have been a "bruising battle." I wonder how a woman, or even a man, can stand the wear and tear on the nerves of such an existence. I do not believe they do. They become something different from what they really are. They grow to be irresponsible, like animals. I can think of no other explanation of what she went on to tell me next. She herself offered no such explanation, no explanation of any kind indeed. She

seemed overwhelmed with her own duplicity and guilt.

It seems that a man whom she met, I believe in the South, attracted her husband first and then her. He was superior to the other men about in wit and intelligence, and she learned to look forward with real pleasure and relief to his talk. He was quick to see the incompatibility between her husband and herself, and seemed at first rather to try to make light of the very evident unhappiness and discord.

“There was nothing bad or mean about him,” she said, “and I don’t believe he had the smallest intention of either falling in love with me, or of making me care for him.”

Apparently they began by matching their wits against one another as a passing amusement, and how readily I can understand

the charm of that with her! The husband, if you please, in the meantime, seemed to take as much interest in the man as did she, and egged them on in their growing friendship. Matters went on at this pace until one day, through some brutality of her husband, she was placed in a perilous position, in which she was only saved from death by the intervention of this man. I suppose these things come about by some mysterious law of amatory gravitation. At any rate, that night he called upon her, condoled with her, pitied her, and kissed her!

“It was my own fault,” she said. “I knew he would come. I dressed for him; I made myself as lovely as I could for him; I tempted him to make love to me; indeed, I am not sure that after that horrible day and in that moonlight I did not love him.” It is easy to see how such a bark as this

drifted on out to sea. They were more and more together, and he more and more infatuated, writing her letters, reading her passages from his favourite books, telling her much of his own life, and making for themselves, she, I am bound to say, as much as he, a life within a life of their own.

I am telling this story in my own words. It came in gasps and sobs from her. Her eyes seemed to grow larger, and her face more wan, and there came that expression of one needing pity and expecting punishment, which drowned my antipathy, and left me only sorrowful. My judgment was wholly disturbed and perverted by my sympathy.

The end of it all was when her husband came upon them together, overheard what was not intended for his ears, and in his fury struck her, and with bitter words of contempt for both left them together. Af-

ter that, her life with him — for he refused to leave her, or to let her go, but stayed to torture her — was that of a prisoner under a bullying and cruel gaoler. The lover, for so I suppose he must be called, behaved — I am tempted to say — as a brave man should. He wrote, he called, he did what he could to mitigate the misery of the situation. He had done wrong, of course; he had no business in such an affair, but he found himself, as you know from bitter experience, in a situation, the most baffling of all situations to a man, where not to continue in wrong-doing gets to look like cowardice.

She, on her part, was entangled in the meshes of repentance, of pity, of loneliness. She came and went, wrote and refused to write, saw him and refused to see him, vacillated as one out of her senses, and probably

nearly drove the man mad, because she was half a mad woman herself. Finally, as I wrote you, the husband was killed, or killed himself, and she, meeting Katharine in New York by accident, was taken at once into her warm and comforting sympathy, and brought here to rest.

That was a sad morning for me, and bitterly sad for her. She was so exhausted that to leave on the morrow was out of the question, and the departure has been postponed until next week.

Bob and Katharine are mystified. I cannot remember that Bob ever showed downright serious irritation with me before.

“What have you been doing to that woman?” he said to me. “What strait-laced morality have you been preaching, anyway? Have you been telling her some tommy-rot about renouncing the world, and

that sort of thing? If you have, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Can't you see that that woman never did any human creature any harm, and never could, and that she belongs in the world, and ought to stay there just as much as Katharine? You and I would be in a pretty mess without Katharine now, wouldn't we?" So he went on with a torrent of talk absolutely unknown to him before.

"Why, my dear old Bob," I said, "how can you think that I would do anything to hurt Mrs. Billings? I am just as fond of her as you are. She has been telling me a very sad story, that's all, and I promise you I have not said a harsh word, or made any such inane suggestion about convents as you accuse me of."

In spite of the seriousness of it all, I could not help a little chuckle to myself

at Bob's expense, — "They don't know everything down in Judee!" Katharine, with that superhuman good sense that neither moth nor rust corrupts, and that some of us might steal from her to our own great profit and improvement, never said a word. She knew very well that, if there was anything to know, she would know it, and know it before anybody else, too. And I suppose she will. What that woman can accomplish when she takes down her hair, puts on her dressing-gown, and goes into another woman's bedroom, would upset the courts of Europe, if all their rulers and all their diplomats were women.

As for me, the whole position is turned topsyturvy. I have been twisted into looking upon myself as not the one to be pitied, but the one having pity to give; as not the weak and helpless one, but as the one who

must be strong and sane for one weaker than I; as not the one seeking peace and happiness for myself, but as the refuge for one in distress.

What is all this feverish, thoughtless love-making to me! What if there are love-letters that should not have been written, or tender passages that had better have been omitted! Of this other man, I know nothing, care nothing. I am sorry for him, not angry with him. He did what he should not have done, but might not I have done as much had I been in his place? In fact, I say to myself even now that I may be on the brink of a worse mistake even than his in its consequences.

Have I not condoned in you, my old friend, much the same wrong-doing? Who am I that I should weight the scales against one man, and then tip them slightly toward

another man because he is my friend, and I believe in him.

Here now, with my parish of two, am I to hurt her, and defend you? Come what may, I am not of the iron mould that can bid her begone, and not try to comfort her. I think you, of all men, will agree with me in this, and share my perplexity and forgive if I make a mistake.

Sunday morning, as the bells were ringing, she came in for the first time since the morning of her confession. The family had gone to church, and I was reading over your letters, as I often do of a Sunday, and preparing to write to you. As she came in, it suddenly occurred to me that, if my confession to you of my own troubles and folly had helped you, why would it not help her to forgive herself, if I told her something of you, something of my other friend, of the

other member of my parish of two, who had suffered much as had she? So after our good morning, I told her to get her work, for I was about to tell her a fable that might interest her, and perhaps help her to understand herself. I told her then about you. How you had made such pitiable mistakes, sinned indeed, in my estimation, and were even now suffering, discontented and embittered. "And yet," I said, "I cannot believe any real wrong of that man. I cannot cast him off, judge him harshly, break away from our long friendship, and bid him good-bye, as one not worthy of my regard or sympathy. I know him too well not to believe that he will recover, that he will pull himself together, and, scarred and maimed in his affections, if you will, still live to be the stronger for this very experience." I became so interested that

I read her passages of your letters to me. I tried to show her how bewildered and unstrung you had become, and how this bewilderment had led on and on, almost to desperation. At last I read her one of your love-letters, and pointed out to her how much worse was your case than hers. In the midst of this reading, she got up and walked up and down the room, and then begged me to stop, that she did not wish to hear more, that she was satisfied, that she felt that she had perhaps unduly magnified her fault. "I am happy enough if you do not think contemptuously of me, if you are willing that I should stay here, if you will let my soiled love love you, if you will be good to me," she burst out, and she knelt down, and put her head on my knees, and held my hands and murmured to herself. Let her stay, love her, be good to her!

Who would not? Certainly I would. I thanked her, and blessed her, and clung to her, and begged her just to sit there, where I could touch her, and know that I was not to awake and find her not there, and find that she had never been there, that it was all a dream.

They must have had a sermon that was exemplarily short that day, for we were still sitting there together when there was a knock, and in came Bob and Katharine. Bob looked amazed, but Katharine seemed to say: "Just what I expected." I turned to them and said:

"I have persuaded this lady to stay, if you will bid her welcome."

"What!" shouted Bob, "you aren't going at all? you're going to join the family? Well, you are a brick! And you, you beggar, you jolly well deserve to be thrashed

for deceiving me. You know," he said, speaking to Mrs. Billings, "that perfidious brute let me make him a long harangue the other day about treating you gently, and he never said boo, and then probably roared with laughter when I had left the room. So you're not going away; well, that is jolly," he continued.

"Oh, yes, I am going away, but, if you will all let me, I am coming back."

"Yes, and coming back next time not to go away again," I said, and she took my hand and said, "Yes, not to go away again." There was tremendous rejoicing amongst the children, and after luncheon they all, Bob as childish as the youngest of them, went off to the stables to pick out a horse, a horse that should be her ownest own, for the new "auntie."

So you see, my dear old Douglas, what

a boon your letters have been to me. You see how good may come out of evil, how Nazareth gives light and love to the world. Through these weary, weary months your letters have been my pleasure and my excitement. Not only was it my friend, but I was, through him, being let into the world, taking part again in its turmoil and strife, and now at the last this life of yours has turned out to be the very key to unlock a new life for me. This is a long, long letter I find on looking it over. But it is a real page of the life of your poor friend, and I knew how delighted you of all men would be to hear of my happiness. And, bless you, dear boy, you have done it. I could see how the effect of your experience, as I told it to her, influenced her. I saw the change in her, as I read her that eloquent letter of yours. She was moved by it

just as I was. If another was strong enough to feel that way, and yet be good and true, after all, — as I am sure, and as I assured her, you were, — then why was it impossible for her, why was it not right for her, to forgive herself and begin anew?

I am so glad to owe it all to you, my dear old fellow! I am so happy, so happy, and, though I am rather worn out, too, I could not rest before telling you of it all. May peace come to you at last, as it has come to me, and may I do for you what you have all unconsciously done for me. Confession, the Fathers were wont to say, is good for the soul, but who amongst them all has done what your confession has done for me, — led the way, made the way easy into new light and love?

Always yours, my dear, dear Douglas,

PERCY DASHIEL.

TWENTY - SECOND LETTER

Mrs. Billings to Douglas Dayton

West Braintree, Sunday night.

I have been wondering if I ought to write to you again ever. We did wrong, or I did wrong, for the woman is always to blame. I wronged one man who is dead. I thought at one time that I had made you, too, unhappy.

How can I describe the awful shock to me of what has just happened, and the relief to me, for it shows that, if I hurt you, it was but lightly.

I have just heard one of *your letters to me* read to me by another man! What can have been the seriousness or the loyalty of a man who could do that? Please do not

answer this. I know there is an explanation. Everything has an explanation. I am happy, and at peace where I am. I have prepared another life for myself. I have found a good man, a man too good for me years ago, a man too good for me now. Let me forget you, as you will so easily forget me. I would have asked you to forgive me; now it seems hardly necessary.

MARY BILLINGS.

TWENTY - THIRD LETTER

Douglas Dayton to Percy Dashiel

Of necessity I have waited some time before answering your letter, as I was obliged to realise that in writing to you now, for the first time, I was writing to a stranger, some one I had never known. So your concave talons stretched out, strong in death, and tore the light of my life away, to be with you and show you the way down the few steps you have yet to take to the tomb that awaits you! I hope the doors will prove strong, for even an insensate grave would try to vomit forth such an unclean thing as you.

So at last you read aloud one of my love-letters to her, it never suggesting itself to you that the woman I loved and the woman you loved were one and the same. It never even dawned on you when she told you the history of our affair almost verbatim, as outlined in my letters to you. Whence this marvellous accession of stupidity? And not even now—not until you read this letter will you know that you are God's accursed. What have you seen in me to lead you to suppose I am the king fool of the world, that you could deceive me so transparently?

I have had a note from Mrs. Billings, telling me of your kindness to yourself in reading aloud one of my letters to her. Naturally I am dismissed; I am not to remain in her mind even as a pleasant memory. I shall be to her forever only as the

thought of a running sore, a something that for a time polluted her life. While you “are a man too good for her years ago, and a man too good for her now” — and this change has been wrought by my friend! Verily must the Devil in hell clap his palms together at the thought of you, O man of God. I sent you those letters as to one dead. I told the tale as one told in the confessional to a priest, and my priest used them as tools to turn the river of a woman’s love, away from his friend and confidant, to irrigate the arid plain of his own life, leaving the man who trusted him to die of thirst.

For conspicuous gallantry, a cross is given; anything so superbly vicious as your act calls for decoration. Why should not an evil, so beyond the capacity of the mind

of man to conceive, be acknowledged as of the great things of this earth?

I am curious to see you. Monstrosities were never in my line, but I suppose it is a duty to one's intelligence and desire of knowledge to see and contemplate, if only for a moment, something that is unique in sin. Your eyes must be different from other men's; the unholy light that flickers in them now has never shone forth from the eyes of the vilest thing yet created, you Knight of the Black Heart. And to think I loved you, next to her — in all the world, I loved you best, and now "I am shamed through all my nature to have loved so slight a thing."

You say in your letter, "If a man breaks up another man's home, the world breaks him." Now if a man breaks another man's trust, then I think the punishments meted

out by this earth are too small, and it is the next world that "breaks him."

Picture yourself on the Judgment Day, waiting until the last, as unfit even to join the ranks of the vilest, for you will be, to the greatest sinners, even as a leper to the living. Picture the face of the God, as He looks down upon you, — *you*, whose prayers all these years have been insults. Were I to award your punishment, you should look for an eternity into my eyes, to read what you saw written there.

I have no doubt, in your new happiness, you will live long, for "those whom the gods love die young," and those whom they despise, they let live to chasten the rest, and what greater punishment could she have, poor woman, than to be tied to you, to have your long, lean, pulseless hands caress the beauties you can't enjoy.

Have you thought of her in all this, and how the time will come when she will look upon you as an upas-tree, the atmosphere of which destroys? — the time when the touch of your hand will leave a red scar; when the sight of your useless, crippled body will make her heart rise in revolt; when the touch of your lips will turn her to ice? Of the time when she first realises how you snared her, when pity for her husband, pity for the man she loved, merged into pity for you? When your very silence and helplessness seemed to cry aloud to her, and point the way of duty? Alas! a second Machiavelli has been found in a priest. I do not envy you, my friend in hell — I am only sorry for her — and myself; but why heap up words against you? “Your soul is not in my soul’s stead,” thank God. All I pray is that, when your “heart panteth

and your strength faileth," may God, in His infinite justice, be deaf and blind to your entreaties and your sufferings.

DOUGLAS DAYTON.

From Mrs. Billings to Douglas Dayton

Percy is dying. He wishes to see you without delay. Come immediately. Your letter killed him.

Editor's Note

Some years after the events described as above, the body of Percy Dashiell was exhumed for family reasons, immaterial to the facts here recorded, and in his hand was found the following letter:—

DEAR PERCY:—

As I wrote to you in my brutal last, it was always to one I thought practically dead that I had written my many letters.

I now write my crowning confession to one I know to be dead and beyond the reach of words. I obtained permission from Bob to inclose in your hand a document before the lid of your coffin shut you out of my sight, but not out of my heart, forever. I told him it was a paper I wanted you to hand to God for me. He looked as if he feared for my mind. I have feared for it often since, but he gave his permission to me, — to me, a finished failure.

There are times when those who have been very near and necessary to us on earth leave us without sufficient imagination to picture them as disembodied spirits. They seem to us to carry with them into the realm of the intangible all their material properties. I don't know how I know, but I am sure somehow, somewhere, you will read this letter with enough knowledge

left, of all things human and imperfect, to understand my apparently crazy wish to communicate with God through you.

He may be Love, He may be Mercy, but He could never listen to me. The first part of my letter is for you alone, for He, of course, knows. For His ears is simply a little humble hope expressed at the end.

This is what happened after I wrote you the letter that murdered you. The woman we both loved wrote and told me what I had done, and said you wanted to see me. I came to you. She met me at the door of your room, and said:

“Go see your work — the work of God cheated of its happiness by the hand of a man unworthy.”

You may remember you asked me before her, with your last breath, to look into your

eyes and read what was there written. Were ever a man's words turned back upon him in such a kindly but final way? For there I read, as if they were letters dotted out upon the sky with stars, the words, "Truth, innocence, and love." Oh, God! as this tidal wave of conviction swept over and engulfed me, how I pitied myself, and envied a few shattered bones, sealed and expressed to the shelter of God's almighty wing! She tells me that she handed my letter to you herself, as you sat bathed in light by your study window. That you clutched it from her, with the words:

"Don't be jealous; this is a letter from one I also love well."

That as you read you smiled, and, turning to her, said, with a note of command in your voice:

"Burn this in my presence. It is only

a letter from a friend that the 'gods have first made mad.' ”

She did so. Then turning to her, you added: “I knew this cup of happiness placed so close to my lips was not for me, but it was placed so close that I, poor mortal, was deceived. Still, I have had, thanks to your presence, my little vision of happiness on earth. You have burned something that, could I live, would make not our union, but your care of me, impossible. I might have known, but I was dull with happiness—it had been so long in coming. Kiss me once before the ‘touch of my lips turns you to ice,’ and send for the man we both love, quick, for I feel God’s wings closing about me,” and then you slept and waited, and I came. We knelt by either side of your chair, for you would not trust a bed until I came. You

told her "dying was too easy when the comfort was so great; you must die with your boots on, as befitted a soldier of the Lord," and then you smiled, as only the "chosen ones" can do.

"Do you forgive?" you murmured.

"Let my life prove it," I answered.

Then turning to her, you said: "Save me a little love, for even heaven would be cold without it."

Then the Lord called — and you answered and were gone.

Now what I have to tell you is this: she and I have separated as completely as you and I have, for all eternity, unless — unless you can make my peace with God. Please try — please try — this is my prayer. Ask Him to forgive me, even as you have done.

Yours gratefully,

DOUGLAS.

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